



T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Graeme Dey MSP
Convenor
Environment, Climate Change, and Land Reform
Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

18 October 2016

Dear Graeme,

PETITION PE1490: Control of Wild Goose Numbers

Thank you for your letter of 22 September 2016 regarding the above petition from Patrick Krause on behalf of the Scottish Crofting Federation, seeking an update on Scottish Government (SG) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) work in managing wild goose numbers.

Policy review

SNH are currently taking forward the review of goose management policy. The RACCE Committee and the then Minister, Dr McLeod agreed that there would be an external Quality Assurance of that work. Arrangements for this process are being put in place. The review will be submitted to the Scottish Government by the end of this year and will be published in due course.

Developments since 2010 Review

Since the previous review in 2010 there has been significant progress in delivering the national goose management policy objectives on a number of key issues. These are:

- The addition of invasive non-native Canada geese to the general licence, which allows shooting of Canada geese throughout the year for the prevention of agricultural damage.
- The introduction of adaptive management approaches in 4 greylag adaptive management pilots and the Islay Sustainable Goose Management Strategy. These projects have, in most cases, reduced the greylag population significantly.
- Improved data collection across a number of goose species.
- Research into the effects on Greenland white-fronted geese of scaring barnacle geese on Islay, and setting up of a wider ringing programme for Greenland white-fronted and barnacle geese.



- Introduction of limited licensed sale of greylag meat to ensure carcasses generated by adaptive management pilots are used and not wasted.
- The work to measure levels of damage caused by geese to agricultural land (as part of the delivery of the Islay Strategy and the adaptive management pilots).
- Improved the delivery and governance structure of schemes.

Goose Schemes

SNH administers 5 local goose management schemes on Islay, Kintyre, South Walls, Solway and Loch of Strathbeg which address conflicts between agriculture and wintering geese (barnacle geese, white-fronted geese and pink-footed geese). These schemes have been in operation since early 2000s and the current plan is to extend them for another 4 years. Offer letters have been sent out to local groups setting out the arrangements for this winter.

SNH have submitted an application to the EC for State Aid clearance for these schemes. The application is currently with the Commission.

Adaptive Management Pilot Projects

There are 4 adaptive management pilot projects on Orkney, Uist, Tiree and Coll, and Lewis and Harris, to address conflicts between agriculture and populations of resident greylag geese. These projects provide support to co-ordinate shooting to reduce greylag goose numbers. They also permit the licensed sale of goose meat. The adaptive management pilot projects are due to end in spring 2017. At that point the data collected will be analysed and decisions will be made on how to take forward sustainable approaches to greylag goose management.

Early indications are that 3 of the projects have managed to reduce the size of resident greylag goose populations to agreed population ranges. For Orkney, this task has been more challenging and the project appears to have stopped population growth but has not managed to reduce the size of the resident greylag goose population.

The Islay Sustainable Goose Management Strategy

The Islay Sustainable Goose Management Strategy aims to reduce to damage to agriculture on the island. The project is entering its third year of operation. Following data collection to measure baseline levels of damage in the first year, work to begin reducing damage by reducing the barnacle goose population began last winter. The bag limits are set using population modelling techniques and in 2015-16 a total of 2160 barnacle geese were shot under licence. The work to reduce damage will take place over a 10 year period and annual bag limits will be confirmed once autumn goose count data is available.

Emerging casework

SNH have provided advice on emerging conflicts between barnacle geese and agriculture in some locations out-with scheme areas. To date 3 licences with very limited bag limits have been issued to prevent serious agricultural damage on North Uist and the Solway.

On Islay, increasing damage by greylag geese on the malting barley harvest has resulted in farmers and a distillery taking forward a co-ordinated management programme. SNH have supported this by issuing licences out of season, where required to prevent damage to the barley crop.

Budget

The current overall cost of goose management is around £1.3 m per annum. Goose Schemes account for the majority of this budget, with adaptive management pilot projects

costing £100k per annum (and these projects are due to end in spring 2017). Scheme costs are made up of payments to farmers for income foregone because of losses from goose grazing, and payments for management such as scaring and shooting. This allocation is currently ring-fenced within SNH's overall budget.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roseanna". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'R'.

Roseanna Cunningham