

## **PE1615/C**

Scottish Countryside Alliance Letter of 25 October 2016

We understand that the Petitions Committee will be taking evidence on Thursday 27 October on Petition PE01615 and are grateful for the opportunity to have input to that hearing.

The Scottish Countryside Alliance is a membership organisation representing landowners, land managers and rural businesses and workers throughout Scotland.

We understand the main rationale behind PE 01615 to be based on raptor persecution and the stated adverse environmental impact of gamebird hunting. Contra to this position, it is our understanding that raptor persecution in areas utilised for game bird shooting has seen a marked decline in recent years, a trend that has been recognised within the Scottish Governments Wildlife Crime reports.

Grouse shooting is a legitimate activity that provides economic benefits, jobs and investment in some of our most remote areas and can offer important benefits for wildlife and habitat conservation. Many of Scotland's grouse moors lie within or are closely aligned to protected area. With protection comes regulation!

Grouse shooting takes place in upland areas, which are important for delivering a range of valuable "ecosystem services", including food and fibre, water regulation, carbon storage, biodiversity and recreational opportunities for health and wellbeing. Furthermore, a number of wildlife focused initiatives such as Heads Up for Harriers and the South of Scotland Golden eagle project, and an increasing number of estates gaining Wildlife Estates Scotland accreditation clearly demonstrate self-regulation and buy in to best practice which we believe to be more effective in promoting species conservation than a shoot licensing system.

There is also strong scientific evidence that the environmental benefits of game shooting are considerable (upland and lowland habitat management, legal predator control and food supply in particular). Any form of land management has some impact on the environment but we believe that in the case of game shooting it is far outweighed by the benefits.

A report by the UK shooting community (Public & Corporate Economic Consultants report 2014: The Value of Shooting) concludes that the overall environmental and economic impact of game bird shooting is positive; the industry has estimated that £250 million per year is spent on management activities substantially benefiting conservation. The industry also supports 1,520 full time equivalent jobs and is worth £97.7 million across Great Britain. Specifically for Scotland, the PACEC study has calculated that there is the equivalent of 3900 full time conservation jobs funded and enabled by shooting, from professional gamekeepers to syndicate members and farm shoots. The environmental management provided by shoots is done voluntarily often at considerable private cost and if it was made too bureaucratic, the incentive for people to do it would decline.

We do not believe that the research being conducted by SNH into regulation of hunting in other countries is likely to show a good basis for shoot licensing. This is not least because it would be very expensive and time and consuming to devise, administer and enforce a licensing system

which was fair and did not remove the incentive to undertake conservation work at private cost and time commitment. It is also likely that licensing would undermine the already fragile trust among rural stakeholders which is essential if collaboration and partnerships are to work successfully.

The Countryside Alliance recently offered evidence to the Westminster debate of grouse shooting and If the Petitions Committee require, we would be pleased to elaborate on these preliminary comments in person along with other organisations involved in game shooting and their thousands of members.

Kindest Regards

Jamie Stewart  
Director  
Scottish Countryside Alliance