

2nd October 2023

Finlay Carson MSP
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH991SP

Dear Finlay Carson MSP,

I write to you in your role as Convener of the RAI Committee to raise concerns over elements of the process during the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act and the subsequent guidance that has now been published by NatureScot.

You will be aware that throughout the process of the passage of the HwD bill and act, the Scottish Government were clear in insisting that interested parties will be consulted, and that the legislation and guidance will be created with the assistance of the rural sector. This was heartening to hear as the people we represent are the industry experts and these are the very people that the legislation will affect.

The Scottish Government did indeed consult with our organisations, and indeed the general public, so that box was ticked. Unfortunately, that seems to be where the process ended. Throughout the creation of the bill and the guidance, a number of meetings has been held with both the Scottish Government and with NatureScot, and many welfare, legal and practical issues were raised. These have virtually all been ignored and now we have both a bill and guidance to accompany it that does not reflect in the slightest what the practitioners, landowners, conservationists needed, in fact, quite the opposite.

It seems that many decisions were made prior to the public consultation, and that since then opinion has been made a priority over fact and science. Repeated efforts to negotiate with both the Scottish Government and NatureScot have been ignored and reasonable arguments, backed up by Lord Bony and independent evidence, have fallen on deaf ears. Now, because of poor legislation and supporting guidance, our livestock and red-listed species are in real danger. Welfare implications are now even greater than they were before and it is a direct result of the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act and the guidance that now accompanies it, which, in itself, goes far beyond what the government intended and must be corrected before it is too late.

It is a distinct possibility that the same lack of genuine engagement will blight us with the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill and, if it does, Scotland's nature is in even bigger trouble than it is now. We don't need another tick-box exercise, we need The Scottish Government to understand fully what the experts have to tell them when creating such laws.

Yours sincerely,

Jake Swindells

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