

For the attention of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee.

The Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) wishes to make an apology to Committee clerks and members. Having agreed to give evidence in the second session of the meeting on Wednesday 8th November on SSPCA powers, the SGA finds it is unfortunately double committed at this time and cannot now send a representative. This is an internal diary and communications oversight on our part, which only came to light on Friday 3rd November.

For clarity, we will still be sending representative Conor Kelly to give evidence in Session 1 on humane cable restrains on Wednesday 8th. This element, therefore, remains unchanged.

In the absence of in-person evidence on SSPCA powers, the SGA wishes to make the following short written submission to the Committee, for evidence session 2.

1/ The SGA remains committed to its position that we oppose further powers for the SSPCA, given the conflict between its position as a campaigning charity and a charity with widening policing functions. We do not believe SSPCA is neutral on game shooting and, fundamentally, we believe Police Scotland should have sole responsibility when it comes to investigating crime.

2/ We note Scottish Government's position on further SSPCA powers, as outlined by the Minister in the previous Committee session. With this in mind, it is the SGA's view that, given previous Committee evidence by Police representatives, that the Parliament should regularly review the arrangements between the Police and SSPCA, to ensure that issues such as primacy are being retained by the Police to their satisfaction, as the Minister described, and that parameters to the extension of powers are not being stretched in their scope in such a way as to move beyond their intention. Scrutiny by the Parliament would help to ensure a check and balance on the new arrangements. The SGA would suggest a bi-annual review and that a review is written into the Bill at Stage 2, as part of the amendment to extend SSPCA powers.

3/ In order to provide transparency and confidence in the extension of powers, protocols between the Police and SSPCA should be published, when agreed. This provides clarity for all parties, and for the public, who may have SSPCA inspectors entering their ground.

Signed, The Committee of The Scottish Gamekeepers Association. 6th November 2023.