

# Cross Party Group on Shooting and Conservation

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at 12pm

Conference Room A Ty Hywel

## Minutes

### 1. Welcome and apologies.

Samuel Kurtz MS welcomed members and stakeholders to the meeting and thanked all for attending.

**Present:** Samuel Kurtz MS, James Evans MS, Llyr Gruffydd MS, Peter Fox MS, Lee Staff member from Joel James MS office, Mike Bryant (Staff), Anna Banks (Staff), David Boden (BASC), Steve Griffiths (BASC), Charles De-Winton (CLA), Rachel Evans (CA), Sue Evans (GWCT), Liam Stokes (BGA), Amanda Harris-Lea (Foxy pheasant), Emma Mellen (GWCT), Kate Miles, (DPJ Foundation), Robert Croft MBE, Dominic Bolton (GFA) and Hugh Edwin Jones (Vaynol Estate)

Apologies received from Darren Millar MS and Louisa Clutterbuck (BGA).

### 2. Mental Health in Rural Communities.

#### GWCT Community Spirit Survey

A PowerPoint presentation from Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) Wales Director Sue Evans covering the Community Spirit research document which was based on a 2020 survey which the GWCT did based on "What game shooting means for Welsh people and the countryside". The research document had 868 submissions and it was important for shooters in Wales to have a voice and tell people exactly:

- Why do you deliver for biodiversity?
- Why do you get involved in shooting?

The focus of the document was on the Future Generations Act and the seven wellbeing goals. A fantastic element of this document is that includes individuals' own words.

The health and wellbeing benefits don't stop in the shooting season as the benefits are seen when individuals are connecting with nature all year around.

An awful lot of kids who join in in the community, whether they're beating or whether they're doing the shooting themselves, and it's a really important element that came through with this report was the fact that the kids integrate within the community the whole way up to grandparents' age.

There's a perception that people all come from rural communities, but we've got quite a few respondents who live in urban communities and others who have worked in the military previously and have come out and have had got mental health issues when they find a community within the shooting community and the game community that they join up with and they find a home there and it gives them a lot of strength and encouragement.

Just one testimonial from the GWCT community spirit document:

“Shooting is crucial to our mental wellbeing during the long winter months”.

<https://www.gwct.org.uk/media/1159395/GWCT-Wales-Community-Spirit-V14-PROOF.pdf>

### Robert Croft MBE

The chairman Samuel Kurtz welcomed Robert Croft MBE.

Questions to Robert Croft MBE from Samuel Kurtz MS covered.

“What benefits you've seen from being a participant in Fieldsports?”

Robert explained that he still lives in the same village he was born in in Southwest, Wales and stated that this conversation is not evidence led more his own personal feelings. Robert described the countryside and fieldsports as his happy place, as he has been involved in shooting and fishing from a young age along with his family, especially his grandfather which he has very fond memories of. Robert explained he has a small shoot of his own whereby they shoot four days a year but spend the other 361 days protecting biodiversity and investing in the area to help the farmer. Shooting provides Robert with a sense of belonging within the community and all the people that shoot with him are family and friends and he is blessed that it has enabled him to meet some lovely people. His shoot also encourages friends from outside Wales to come and visit because of the shooting and they invest locally into hotels, pubs and restaurants which is a massive benefit to the local area.

Robert told some personal stories of pressures and difficulties he had experienced in his cricket career and life in general, it was his friends and the shooting community that enabled him to press the reset button on himself or get away. The countryside and my shoot were a place for me to go and enjoy nature, the shooting community people didn't judge me or treat me different they supported me.

Samuel Kurtz MS asked Robert “When we've talked about the difficulties the industry is facing and this pastime is facing at the moment and some of the language coming out of the government isn't necessarily supportive of this industry, what impact do you think would come if those levers were pulled and what we've discussed would become more difficult to do in Wales?”

Robert explained first the massive impact it would have on the rural economy which I personally feel there is no way of replacing. Also, the human element, I think the loneliness will hit a lot of people as the shooting community become part of your extended family. People won't get the opportunities to get physical fitness, fresh air, connection with nature and socialize. Robert is a strong believer that story telling is a big part of learning and the age demographic of shooting enables this to happen a lot as you have mixed age groups all socialising together. Countryside education would suffer as those that are involved in shooting understand the eco-system and when birds nest and what the seasons are. Also, the management of land would suffer. Shooting involves a broad background of people from all walks of life, and they don't judge you and in the shooting field you are all equal so you can switch off from the pressures of life and recharge your batteries. It's a way of socialising and a release for many people in the countryside.

Roberts final words “Wales has been known for a country that cares and I think that its important that we make sure that we care for our rural communities that don't have access to theaters, restaurants, gyms and sports fields. It's a great place the countryside but it also can be a tough place and very lonely.”

## Kate Miles DPJ Foundation

The DPJ Foundation was set up seven years ago now, following the death by suicide of Daniel Pickton Jones. Dan was an agricultural contractor, was married to a farmer's daughter, had grown up in the countryside, and he was 33 when he died.

He, from the outside had a perfect life. He had a beautiful wife, two lovely young children and a good business and a great home. But despite all that, he felt that life wasn't worth living. Emma was aware that Dan was struggling with mental health.

But like most 27 year olds, she didn't know how to help him.

She tried to do the sort of things that probably most of us would do, try to keep him safe by avoiding him having access to potentially lethal things, trying to be with him as much as she could, but actually now she knows that that props wasn't the right thing to have done.

And what she should have done is spoken to him directly and asked him about his thoughts of suicide and tried to get him to talk in that way. Because of that, Emma established the DPJ foundation.

DPJ offer a 24/7 telephone and text helpline that's available to anybody connected with Welsh agriculture. DPJ also pay for counselling with professional counselors for those who want that we don't say to somebody you're not ill enough or you're too well.

If somebody wants to access support then we can provide that and in the 5 1/2 years that the service has been running, we've supported more than 800 people with counseling, with professional counselling across the whole of Wales.

Kate used an analogy of a stress bucket that we carry around daily and your everyday stresses go into this bucket. DPJ understand recognize that shooting is an activity that many farmers and rural people use in Wales to empty this bucket and off load.

It's also vital to understand that shooting sports is vital to many people in rural communities as it hits many wellbeing goals which we have already heard during this meeting but to recap:

- Multi-generational
- It keeps older people young.
- It's an opportunity for people to shut off.

It also achieves all five ways to wellbeing:

- Connect.
- Get active.
- Take notice.
- Learn
- Give

Shooting enables people to achieve all of the above wellbeing goals. Kate linked each of the wellbeing goals to a scenario and told the group about an incident whereby a shooter was referred to them through speaking out about how he felt to friends on a shoot day and they supported him in contacting DPJ for support.

Shooting enables so many farmers to get off the farm for the day and socialise and gives them something to look forward to and an opportunity to talk and mix within a community. Shooting isn't just a release for rural people though we all know of people that live in towns and city that go shooting in the countryside. It isn't an affluent sport and we need to ensure that a positive message is portrayed explaining the health and wellbeing benefits.

A discussion was had regarding individuals going to the doctors regarding mental health in fear that their gun license will be taken off them. This needs to be dealt with more sensitively with police departments using methods like counselling and ensuring that someone is with the individual if this happens. Also, for this to only be used short term why they recover and get support.

### **3. AOB.**

- The recent NRW gamebird release consultation has closed.
- James Evans MS would personally like to Thank Helen Jones and Dan Munford for their help in arranging the three public meetings in Wales attended by BASC, CA, CLA, NGO and GWCT. He asked for this to be documented in minutes.
- CA/BASC are hoping for these meeting to continue in the Autum.
- Discussions had around TV documentaries and marketing campaigns around the benefits of shooting and health benefits. (All)
- Campaigns around the diverse group of people involved and why they do it. (All)
- The Royal Welsh Show. (Samuel Kurtz MS)
- Eat game events at the Senedd and game on the Senedd menu. Rachel Evans  
CA

### **4. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be discussed in due course. BASC, the secretary for this group, will keep everyone informed.