

7 October 2024

Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF 99 1SN

Dear Members of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee,

We understand that a request has recently been made to the Committee to consider conducting an inquiry into the use of “cages” for pheasants and partridges by the game sector in Wales. Whilst the term is not explicitly defined in the request, we take this to reference the use of Raised Laying Units (RLUs). RLUs are a type of accommodation commonly used in the game sector to house breeding birds, usually for a short period of a few months during the breeding season, as they can offer significant advantages to bird welfare, biosecurity and egg hygiene.

If the committee decides to progress this matter, as the only organisation representing the game rearing sector in Wales, The Game Farmers’ Association, along with partners at Aim to Sustain (an umbrella organisation representing the game sector with GWCT acting as scientific advisors) would like to bring a variety of evidence to the committee that will help to create a more informed platform for decision making in this space. We would particularly like to draw the committee’s attention to a major scientific research project carried out in Wales, and overseen by Defra, that specifically addressed concerns about the welfare standards of RLUs. The “independent impact assessment of animal welfare for game birds kept in cages for breeding” that the committee has been urged to set up would, we feel, be a duplication of this research.

There is a variety of other areas relevant to this topic that we would like to discuss, which collectively address all the concerns highlighted to the committee in recent correspondence. We feel that the discussion of these points will save the committee a considerable amount of time, should it decide to include this matter in its forward work programme. We would also like to draw the committee’s attention to discussions that we had with representatives of the Welsh Government in September 2019, concerning a review of the Code of Welfare for Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes in Wales, at which RLU’s were discussed in considerable detail. The aforementioned research was reviewed as part of these discussions and no changes to the Code were proposed as a result.

Should the Committee decide to take the issue of RLUs any further we would very much like to present our evidence to the Committee in person at the earliest opportunity and we await your response.

Yours Faithfully,



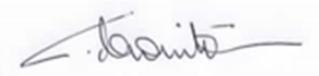
George Davis
(The Game Farmers' Association)



Rachel Evans
(Countryside Alliance)



David Pooler
(National Gamekeepers' Organisation)



Charles De Winton
(Country Land & Business Association)



Roger Draycott
(Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust)