

Hannah Blythyn AC/AM
Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd
Minister for Environment



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA – P/LG/2404/18

Clare Pillman
Chief Executive
Natural Resources Wales
Ty Cambria
29 Newport Road
Cardiff
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9 July 2018

Dear Clare,

Thank you very much for sight of the detailed review you have undertaken on the Use of Firearms on land managed by Natural Resources Wales and the recommendations for their future use on the Welsh Government estate.

I understand the NRW Board is meeting to discuss these recommendations on 12 July and thought it would be helpful to feed in the Welsh Government position with regard to shooting from the wider policy, ethical and welfare context as an aid to the considerations.

With the current focus of Brexit falling on the economic and social impact, it's also important to remember that as a Government we are absolutely committed to the environment in Wales and to the full implementation of the Well Being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The evidence from Wales' first 'The State of Natural Resources' report is clear the environmental challenges we face require transformational action and in Wales' first natural resources policy, we described how reversing the decline in biodiversity and improving ecosystem resilience is central to my approach.

Linked to this is of course the way we treat our animals and birds. It is an important reflection of our society's values and they should not be subjected to any unnecessary suffering. Whilst there is no specific legislation regulating the breeding and rearing of gamebirds their welfare is protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Once released into the wild, the birds are not specifically protected outside the close season. It is acknowledged the breeding of gamebirds does not currently take place on the Welsh Government estate, however, birds are held in holding pens on the estate prior to release. Shooting and its associated activities can therefore be very emotive issues with a wide range of views held by different interests.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

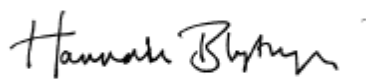
We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I have therefore carefully considered the review recommendations and broadly agreed with the first two recommendations relating to NRW use of firearms for managing wild species, which impact on their objectives and other people's use of firearms for managing wild species which impact on their neighbour's land management objective. I recognise these are legitimate activities with a purpose to support appropriate pest control and land management environmental objectives.

I understand in most cases wildfowling is an important form of management, however, I have concerns regarding the shooting of conservation species. I therefore ask NRW ornithologists to investigate the impact of wildfowling on rarer bird species.

The NRW review looked at the purpose for which shooting is undertaken in the context of the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources. However, the review did not go as far as to consider some of the wider policy and ethical issues. Whilst shooting on private land is for the landowner to decide, we need to take account of wider considerations and public views in considering what happens on the Welsh Government estate. Given the wider policy issues and concerns, the Welsh Government does not support commercial pheasant shooting, or the breeding of gamebirds or the birds being held in holding pens on the estate prior to release on the Welsh Government Estate. I would ask our position on these issues is fed into the NRW discussions of future shooting activities on the Welsh Government estate and you consider not renewing the pheasant shooting lease agreements as they expire.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hannah Blythyn'.

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