

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Ymchwiliad Bioamrywiaeth | Biodiversity Inquiry

BIO 07

Ymateb gan : Cymdeithas Saethu a Chadwraeth Prydain

Evidence from : British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)

## Overview

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) welcomes the Committee's inquiry into the forthcoming Public Goods scheme. How we invest in Welsh land when not a member of the European Union is of great importance and provides opportunities to make a scheme that best suits the people and environment of Wales.

In this paper BASC is submitting four evidence-based recommendations for the Committee to consider..

**Recommendation 1: A Public Goods Scheme that is supportive of shooting to benefit from its pre-existing investment and contribution to biodiversity conservation.**

**Recommendation 2: A Public Goods Scheme that provides options to increase the contribution of shooting for biodiversity conservation. For example it could:**

- contain options of interest to those that shoot at the farm scale, recognising the added value the people who shoot can bring to meeting the outcomes.
- support agreements to organisations, like BASC or a Wildlife Trust, that will deliver specific public goods at the landscape scale.

**Recommendation 3: A Public Goods Scheme that recognises and supports pest and predator control to help deliver biodiversity restoration.**

**Recommendation 4: Those developing the scheme work closely with BASC and key groups such as Gylfinir Cymru and the Wales Squirrel Forum, to ensure it delivers for people and environment.**

## The British Association for Shooting and Conservation

BASC is the representative body for sporting shooting in the UK and, with a membership of over 150,000, is the UK's largest shooting organisation. It aims to protect and promote sporting shooting and the wellbeing of the countryside throughout the UK. It actively supports conservation, good firearms licensing practice, training, education, scientific research and practical habitat and wildlife management.

Shooting and conservation are inextricable; one cannot exist without the other in the UK. A core element of BASC's work both within and outside the UK, is to work closely with government, NGOs and BASC members to ensure that the benefits of well-managed shooting for conservation are maximised, and recognised.

BASC has a proven track record of working with government departments; for example we have worked closely with the Welsh Government in the creation of codes of practice and developing strategies and policies that benefit nature conservation.

Shooting and farming form a natural synergy. Shooters rely on a close working relationship with farmers to ensure that shooting can take place on land that may otherwise not be open to the public. Farmers, land owners and managers also know the immense benefits to the environment that comes from shooting.

BASC has evidence for the committee to consider on the first and second points listed under the inquiry's terms of reference.

How could the Welsh Government's proposed Public Goods Scheme, set out in *Brexit and Our Land*, be applied to restore biodiversity?

**Recommendation 1: A Public Goods Scheme that is supportive of shooting to benefit from its pre-existing investment and contribution to biodiversity conservation.**

The approach as stated in *Brexit and Our Land* will help restore biodiversity because it intends to support habitat creation and management in absence of a financial market. However BASC feel strongly that the scheme, as written, overlooks the value of recreational activities in helping provide public goods through the same process.

Those engaged in shooting sports invest time and money into habitat and species management to support game and other wildlife on private land throughout Wales. Information from *The Value of Shooting: The economic, environmental and social benefits of shooting sports to the UK (PACEC 2014)*<sup>i</sup> provides robust evidence of the benefits shooting provides for the maintenance and enhancement of natural resources across Wales.

Shooting is worth £75 million to the Welsh economy annually and supports the equivalent of 2,400 full time jobs in Wales. Shooters spend £7.4 million annually in Wales on conservation. This includes direct habitat management and creation, as well as pest control activities to support conservation. The effort that goes into conservation work from shooting in Wales is the equivalent of 120,000 work days and 490 full-time conservation jobs. Shooting influences the management of circa 18% of all land in Wales (380,000 hectares).

A scheme that is supportive of shooting activity would benefit from this pre-existing contribution. Should a scheme be restrictive towards shooting then these benefits would be lost and may result in a net loss of public goods being provided by an agreement.

**Recommendation 2: A Public Goods Scheme that provides options to increase the contribution of shooting for biodiversity conservation. For example it could:**

- **contain options of interest to those that shoot at the farm scale, recognising the added value the people who shoot can bring to meeting the outcomes.**
- **support agreements to organisations, like BASC or a Wildlife Trust, that will deliver specific public goods at the landscape scale.**

As evidenced under recommendation 1 shooting sports provide substantial resources for public goods delivery. If the scheme were to directly support options relevant to shooting activities, then this could unlock substantial additional delivery for public goods.

Evidence to support this position is readily available. We refer you to the review of shooting conducted by NRW, which reported to the NRW board on 12 July 2018. This report was founded on an open call for evidence in 2017, gathering over 220 pieces of qualifying evidence, followed by a rigorous review process including independent external assurance. These detailed reports are available on the NRW website and include a plethora of scientific papers detailing the conservation benefits the habitat and species management provided by shooting activities.<sup>ii</sup>

This review concluded that the use of firearms on public land was consistent with the principles of the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and met NRW's purpose, land management objectives and endorsed the consideration of applications for shooting-based recreation.

In particular with reference to recreational shooting it concluded from the evidence that: *"The activities related to third party shooting, (gamebirds, rough shooting and wildfowling) on land that we manage have the potential to positively contribute to SMNR and well-being, such as rural enterprise, jobs, additional habitat management and community cohesion."*

The report stated that shooting activities abiding by codes of practice and undertaking additional habitat management were likely to result in biodiversity gain.

Therefore, within the future framework of a Public Goods Scheme, support to enable people who shoot to undertake additional habitat management and creation would unlock additional resources for biodiversity restoration and other public goods. The Public Good Scheme should also consider funding species management work where this is essential to delivering these goods (see examples under recommendation 3)).

Landscape scale management, natural capital and ecosystem services initiatives are becoming increasingly important in light of pressure on the UK's natural environment from development, population growth and climate change. Shooting can help deliver conservation outcomes in these areas and we have run many successful projects with partners throughout the UK.

Since 2003 BASC has and continues to work in partnership with the statutory agencies in Wales as a strategic funded partner to deliver public goods at the local and landscape scale. Project work has always been in collaboration with wider partners, the shooting community and, critically, the farming community. Projects range from improving the quality and extent of habitat for marsh fritillary butterflies at the site scale, planting female black poplars in strategic locations to increase the population range of this rare species, substantially improving ancient semi-natural woodland connectivity using improved habitat management and creation at the farm scale, to landscape scale invasive non-native species control networks to benefit native species, especially water vole and red squirrel.

Therefore, to enable landscape scale work then the scheme should also consider funding organisations to lead on the delivery work. An example of this could be species management projects where a collection of landowners may not have the skills or infrastructure to coordinate action across multiple farms.

In practice the scheme could:

- Contain options of interest to those that shoot at the farm scale, recognising the added value the people who shoot can bring to meeting the outcomes.
- Support agreements to organisations, like BASC or a Wildlife Trust, that will deliver specific public goods at the landscape scale.

### **Recommendation 3: A Public Goods Scheme that recognises and supports pest and predator control to help deliver biodiversity restoration.**

Pest and predator control activities are typically unpaid for, but are essential to farming. Rabbits have been estimated to cost the Great Britain economy around £260 million a year including damage to crops.<sup>iii</sup> Corvids can also cause severe crop damage.<sup>iv</sup> Fox predation is an issue for farmers in terms of livestock depredation. Overall, the direct cost to UK agriculture from fox predation has been estimated at £12 million annually, comprising £9.4m to the sheep sector, £0.7m to egg producers, £0.2m to turkey producers, £0.4m to goose producers and £1m to pig producers.<sup>v</sup>

Shooters help increase food security by controlling numbers of crop pests and predators – between 2012 and 2013 the estimated numbers of woodpigeon, rabbit, corvids and fox controlled by UK shooters were 1.1 million, 520,000, 300,000 and 66,000 respectively. Furthermore, the effort put into pest control by UK shooters is equivalent to 3,100 full time jobs annually.<sup>i</sup> Over half (37,800) of all shoot providers carry out wildlife management and pest control, either to protect game or habitat. Furthermore, there are an estimated 220,000 individuals carrying out control of avian pests and 140,000 individuals controlling mammalian pests and predators in the UK. These are known underestimates as they do not include those animals controlled as part of a job, so for example the number killed by the estimated 21,000 full-time equivalent game keepers and shoot managers in the UK are not included.<sup>i</sup>

Deer populations are expanding throughout the UK including in Wales. Welsh Government's Wild deer management in Wales strategy recognises the intrinsic value of deer and highlights the need to manage the negative impacts of native and non-native deer species on biodiversity, timber production and road traffic collisions. Part of their strategy to do this is through responsible culling and although NRW staff manage deer on some of the Welsh Government public estate, recreational stalkers are a key component in wider landscape scale management. It is estimated that UK shooters controlled 184,000 deer<sup>i</sup> in 2012 and 2013 at the UK scale which indicates the scale and challenge of the task at hand.

However, there are still serious problems caused by pests and predators in respect of conservation and environmental targets and there are strong cases that financial intervention is needed. For example, curlew is a conservation priority internationally; it is globally-near threatened under IUCN and a red-listed bird of concern in England and Wales. The lack of breeding success of these ground-nesting birds is considered the primary reason for their rapid population decline. The reasons for this are complex but current evidence indicates suitably managed habitat mosaics at the landscape scale and protection from predation during breeding season are immediate requirements that need long-term support. Both these interventions could be supported by the new Public Goods Scheme. Advice can be sought from Gylfinir Cymru (Curlew Cymru), a cross-sector group to champion curlew conservation in Wales on what those options could look like. Contact can be made through NRW.

A second example are grey squirrels, that pose a range of environmental and economic threats: they debark trees,<sup>vi</sup> exert predation pressure on woodland bird species<sup>vii</sup> and have negative impacts on red squirrel populations.<sup>viii</sup> BASC and individual shooters are running targeted grey squirrel control operations throughout the UK to benefit timber production, biodiversity and red squirrels. Under BASC's Green Shoots biodiversity programme we BASC is also being funded by a NRW grant to support partners in targeted grey squirrel control to benefit red squirrels in mid-Wales.

BASC is a member of the Wales Squirrel Forum, which has been requested by Welsh Government to help implement and review the Grey Squirrel Management Action Plan released in November 2018.<sup>ix</sup> What is clear from BASC's operational and policy experience is that grey squirrel management needs additional support to be effective at the landscape scale. The Public Good Scheme should work with the experience of the Wales Squirrel Forum to shape options to help deliver the Welsh Government's Grey Squirrel Management Action Plan. Contact with the Wales Squirrel Forum can be made through NRW.

Clearly this scheme must continue to be open to input from people and organisations to help shape it properly. BASC encourages wider consultation with those committed to biodiversity conservation.

**Recommendation 4: Those developing the scheme work closely with BASC and key groups such as Gylfinir Cymru and the Wales Squirrel Forum, to ensure it delivers for people and environment.**

How the various existing Welsh Government policies and legislation for biodiversity restoration could be applied in the design and implementation of the proposed Public Goods scheme

The Committee's overview for this consultation on its webpages covers the main policy drivers. Public scheme designs often refer to these policies and legislation in order to create a targeting and/or scoring system to determine where funds should be allocated without assessing the wishes, resources and interests of landowners and local people.

BASC's message is simple and pragmatic as the new scheme is looking to support outcomes, not adherence to prescriptions. The scheme should try and select agreements where the landowner and other land managers, like those who shoot, have a strong commitment to meet the outcomes. This is rational as regardless of how the payment for an outcome is determined, it is not going to be linked to the individual costs different landowners and managers will need to put in to meet it. The scheme needs to work with those that really want the options selected, be that clean water, new woodlands or individual species recovery.

## References

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- <sup>ii</sup> <https://naturalresources.wales/ShootingReviewConsultation?lang=en>
- <sup>iii</sup> CABI. The economic cost of invasive non-native species on Great Britain. (CABI, 2010).
- <sup>iv</sup> Kennedy, T. F. & Connery, J. An Investigation of Seed Treatments for the Control of Crow Damage to Newly-Sown Wheat. *Irish Journal of Agricultural and Food Research* 47, 79–91 (2008).
- <sup>v</sup> Harris, S. & Yalden, D. W. *Mammals of the British Isles: Handbook*. Mammals of the British Isles: Handbook (Oxford University Press, 2008).
- <sup>vi</sup> Mayle, B. A. & Broome, A. C. Changes in the impact and control of an invasive alien: the grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) in Great Britain, as determined from regional surveys. *Pest Manag. Sci.* 69, 323–333 (2013).
- <sup>vii</sup> Fuller, R. J., Noble, D.G.Smith, K. W. & Vanhinsbergh, D. Recent declines in populations of woodland birds in Britain: a review of possible causes. *Br. Birds* 116–143 (2006).
- <sup>viii</sup> Gurnell, J., Wauters, L. A., Lurz, P. W. W. & Tosi, G. Alien species and interspecific competition: effects of introduced eastern grey squirrels on red squirrel population dynamics. *J. Anim. Ecol.* 73, 26–35 (2004).
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://beta.gov.wales/grey-squirrel-management-action-plan-for-wales>