

Cross Party Group on Conservation and Shooting AGM

12:00 pm Wednesday 27 November 2019
Tŷ Hywel, Cardiff Bay

In Attendance

Andrew R T Davies AM, Welsh Conservatives – Chair
Russell George AM, Welsh Conservatives
Llyr Gruffydd AM, Plaid Cymru
Neil Hamilton AM, United Kingdom Independence Party
Mark Isherwood AM, Welsh Conservatives
Mandy Jones AM, Welsh Brexit Party
Richard Pritchard (Caseworker for Caroline Jones AM, Welsh Brexit Party)
David Rowlands AM, Welsh Brexit Party

Steve Griffiths - BASC director Wales
George Carroll - Office of Andrew R T Davies AM
Sian Smith – BASC political officer Wales

Guest Speaker

Christopher Graffius - BASC's executive director of communications

Guests

Liam Bell – Chair of the National Gamekeepers' Organisation
Philip Yapp - Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust
Charles De Winton – Country Land and Business Association
Elliot ?- Country Land and Business Association
Rhian Novoll-Philips – Countryside Alliance Director Wales (acting?)
Bernard Griffiths – Policy Officer, National Farmers Union Wales

Apologies

Adam Price AM
Angela Burns AM

1. Welcome from Chair, Andrew RT Davies AM

Mr Davies welcomed colleagues, associates and guests to the meeting and went through housekeeping. All in attendance were asked to introduce themselves and the need for an AGM was stated.

Andrew RT Davies was nominated as Chair by Mandy Jones AM and seconded by Rhian Novoll-Philips. Mr Davies accepted.
Steve Griffiths, BASC, was nominated to provide secretariat Rhian Novoll-Philips proposed and Charles De Winton seconded the proposal. Mr Griffiths accepted.

2 (change from item 3 on agenda) **Medical licences - Public Safety and doctors' involvement in firearms licensing**

Christopher Graffius, BASC, Executive Director of Communications

Christopher Graffius opened by stating that medical licences are a matter of public safety and in the interest of all. Coverage during the lifetime of the license is recommended, as are markers to licenses so that action can be taken. Christopher then mentioned the Essex trials.

The committee for the BMA argued against fees. Licensing is a reserved matter.

Gwent Police introduced a mandatory requirement for applicants requesting a firearm or shotgun certificate to provide a medical certificate from their GP. The change in policy had not been publicised and applicants were made aware of the policy change via the police website seven weeks after the change was made.

The requirement becomes mandatory in the new year, at which time, all Welsh forces will require mandatory verifications.

Christopher Graffius commented that the new system diminishes safety and only provides confirmation on the day not at any time subsequently. The new system does not require lifetime coverage and the police cannot enforce it.

Wales pre-empts what will happen elsewhere. Public safety is compromised with no statutory duty for doctors to participate, which is necessary. CG will be asking why this has not been done.

David Rowlands AM asked whether Welsh Government will be able to bring in legislation?

Christopher Graffius replied that Wales have influence in respect of health matters and Wales could potentially unblock.

Mandy Jones commented that in Wales Labour have the all the power and can vote through anything unchallenged.

Christopher Graffius stated that BASC and partner organisations would lobby Welsh Government.

Richard Pritchard expressed concern that people would be deprived of licences by doctors, who are opposed to shooting, refusing to provide a medical certificate.

Christopher Graffius responded that the decision to grant licenses is a matter for the police and Government and not medical doctors. Christopher commented that the cost of a check of a medical record and tick box exercise by police is recommend to be £30 – £40. Barriers, i.e. the cost of a medical certificate, to shooting have a serious impact potentially resulting in less applications and a knock on effect to the economy.

Neil Hamilton Commented that it is best left to Parliament to make decisions, through the Home Office/Westminster, because amendments could be made in wales by those, in Welsh Government, who are anti-shooting (NRW) and agreed with the substance of Christopher Graffius comments.

Christopher Graffius mentioned that Labour candidates have professed support for shooting, but agrees the matter is best dealt with in Westminster.

Charles De Winton spoke about peoples experiences of firearms confiscation and stressed the need for people to talk to each other to help prevent problems arising.

Christopher Graffius acknowledged the importance of performing public duty as citizens and made the point that there would be a greater chance of picking up problems if markers are placed on medical records.

Rhian Novoll-Philips mentioned that next year the PCC elections will be taking place, which will provide an opportunity for lobbying.

Christopher Graffius responded that medical licenses are an operational matter and not dealt with by the PCC.

Richard Pritchard expressed concern about the impact of revoking a license.

Christopher Graffius responded that a license can be reinstated and cited the example that when there was a loss of pistols compensation was made to the owners.

Elliot commented that the threat of confiscation can put people off seeking help for mental health problems.

Action Andrew Davies asked for a handout of Christopher Graffius presentation– Steve agreed to supply within next 7 days.

Andrew Davies pointed out that it was not possible to flag veteran's records without consent Christopher Graffius responded that the new system being implemented would allow records to be flagged and agreement can be obtained as part of the license application.

Andrew Davies commented that the system in Wales is different to England, which may be a problem.

3 Changes to General Licences

Steve Griffiths, BASC, director Wales

Steve did small introduction on the History of General Licences and How Wild Justice had written to NRW and the various actions that NRW have taken since then. He spoke about the Users stakeholders group set up and the usefulness of that group.

Mandy Jones said that we cannot have confidence in NRW.

Andrew Davies mentioned it is very positive to see that eight Assembly Members are represented at the meeting.

Liam Bell Mentioned Corvids and that the numbers of Curlews are plummeting, they are long lived and numbers mainly consist of older birds, waiting for chicks and eggs to arrive to protect Curlews is too late and NRW are not listening to the evidence.

Charles De Winton stated that he agreed with all that had been said and that NRW are not listening to scientific evidence.

Philip Yapp pointed out that his remit is conservation and General Licences are unworkable and not suitable to deal with corvids and wildlife persecution.

Mandy Jones discussed NRW not taking responsibility in respect of a Bangor on Dee river incident and the lack of information about what is in licences. Mandy commented about being passed back and forward and that NRW could lose a generation.

Andrew Davies agreed with Mandy Jones comments about being pushed from pillar to post by NRW.

Russell George suggested a request goes to NRW and Ministers to attend the next Cross Party for Conservation and Shooting group meeting.

Action Andrew RT Davies to extend invitation to NRW and Ministers.

Mark Isherwood is Curlew Champion and discussed attending a meeting, at no 10, where it was stated the Curlew could be gone in 15 years. The reasons for the loss being land management and predators. The Minister agrees to work with Gylfinir Cymru.

Mandy Jones mentioned a court case involving fisherman.

Llyr Gruffydd said NRW claim that they have adequate resources when asked about whether the budget is assured, but we do not believe them. There are good people at NRW with an unrealistic workload that cannot be achieved. Officials and David Henshaw should be invited to next Cross Party for Conservation and Shooting Group meeting. If NRW are ignoring evidence there is a case for a judicial review.

Andrew Davies stated that shooting provides an important plank for Conservation.

Neil Hamilton said that there is scope for committee to get scientific justification for what we are trying to achieve. Respecting general Licences, politics trumped science.

Llyr Gruffydd mentioned that general scrutiny for the Environmental Minister has just taken place. Clair Pullman's scrutiny is expected Jan/Feb.

Andrew Davies pointed out that there are three terms left and budget scrutiny will take place in January. Mr Davies asked for assistance from all partner organisations present with Environment Committee.

Mark Isherwood suggested Patrick Lindley should be invited to the next meeting.

Christopher Graffius volunteered that Liam Bell is Chair of the National Gamekeepers Organisation and can provide information for the Environment Committee.

Llyr Gruffydd commented that the committee may write to NRW initially and information provided will help to inform the letter.

Mandy Jones mentioned that NRW have 14 to 17 days to respond.

Mr Pritchard asked about a review, and commented that most around the table feel general licences are not workable.

Steve Griffiths replied that a review will happen next year and mentioned that there will be a mop-up meeting in January.

4 Date of Next Meeting

Andrew Davies suggested the next Cross Party Group meeting take place before February half term, the chair will set a date and the secretary will circulate.