

From: [REDACTED]
To: [2002 Act Review](#)
Subject: The "Scottish Hunting Act" ie the Protection of wild mammals Scotland Act 2002
Date: 30 March 2016 20:54:26

Dear Lord Bonomy,

I understand you are to review the above this spring / summer and I would like to take this opportunity to make comment for your consideration when reviewing the current legislation.

I believe that using hounds is the most efficient way to locate the predatory fox. Hounds as you know work by scent, so can locate foxes even in dense cover, such as gorse or bracken or thick woods etc, no other method can achieve this. Hounds can also establish whether a fox has been present (even if it has moved on) helping establish whether there is in fact fox activity in the area.

All mounted hunts diligently liaise with farmers over whose land they cross to seek their express consent. In other words without their consent and support the hunt could not operate. The majority of farmers, land owners and game keepers over whose land they do cross, do not hunt nor indeed do they ride but they recognise the benefit of the service the hunt offers in terms of fox control. It is those parties who are directly effected by the predatory activity of the fox that support, invite and welcome the hunt over their ground to ensure efficient fox control.

There is a suggestion that those opposed to the current legislation wish to reduce the number of hounds used eg to 2?. This is illogical. Using only two hounds will both reduce the efficiency in locating a fox and further ensure it takes longer to 'flush' the fox as it will be under less pressure to leave the covert. Thus the suggestion of reducing the number of hounds is actually counter productive in terms of efficient fox control and minimising stress to the fox. A pack of say 20 hounds will enter cover and quickly establish whether a fox is present, locate same if it is there and ensure it is flushed quickly to waiting guns to be dispatched.

There is also I understand some suggestion that those wishing to amend the law would like to see those controlling the hounds banned from using horses? Again this is also simply illogical and has no bearing on animal welfare and perhaps brings into question the motivations of the hunt saboteurs. Indeed, when controlling a pack of hounds, it is more efficient to use horses (than say quad bikes for example) as they are both quieter and more efficient at crossing 'enclosed fields' when moving from cover to cover or to control hounds or helping direct foxes to the line of guns. Quad bikes will be unable to take a direct route over obstacles such as walls, fences, hedges and gates etc if for example hounds need to be stopped. Further, Horses give the huntsman a higher vantage point, are quieter, less obtrusive and also clearly much quicker than on foot.

Whilst not part of your review, to ban horses would mean a not insignificant impact on the economic contribution those using horses make to often fragile local rural economies. Grooms, vets, feed merchants, saddlers, blacksmiths and those who repair horse boxes etc would all suffer financially. Each hunt can have anywhere between 20 and 50 horses out at a time and many keep more than one horse if they are involved in fox control more than once a week. That all adds up. We are seeing the fragile economic state of rural communities coming under increasing pressure with farmers struggling severely with low global gate prices for produce against rising costs. This means less spend in the local community to keep costs down. We don't need to exacerbate this problem further by the nonsensical banning of the use of horses in fox control.

The evidence is there that there has been a fairly high conviction rate for incidents which breach the current legislation although virtually none involving mounted packs. This is despite almost persistent monitoring by 'antis' and a regular (indeed welcomed) police presence. This is because the mounted fox packs adhere to a strict code of conduct, liaise with Police Scotland in providing location of meets, exact details of 'guns' present and a review of the day after hunting. It should also be noted that the mounted packs do not try to conceal their identity by wearing balaclavas and paramilitary style clothing. The same can not be said for the saboteurs, who do so under the pretence of fear of reprisals (there have been none as far as I am aware in Scotland) but in truth, do so to try and avoid prosecution themselves (due to inability to identify the culprits) for criminal activity whether that be aggregated trespass, harassment, intimidation, assault, threatening behaviour, damaging crops or deliberately leaving live stock gates open on farms that allow the hunt to cross their land. It's interesting to note that despite there having been none or very limited convictions involving mounted packs

there have been a number (and some are pending) successful prosecutions involving illegal activities of saboteurs.

As suggested above, I believe those wishing to see the legislation amended are either totally against fox control in whichever format, be that snaring, lamping, gassing or using a pack of hounds to flush foxes to guns or simply hold an emotive prejudice against those who control foxes using hounds and horses.

Indeed I would go so far as to say they perceive that those engaged in this form of fox control are somehow exercising some sort of upper class ritual and as such the hunt saboteurs are engaged in a 'class war'. This is of course utter nonsense as those involved in mounted packs come from a very diverse albeit mainly rural background unlike the majority of the saboteurs.

Those opposed to mounted packs controlling foxes are young, media, computer and politically savvy (perhaps unlike those controlling the foxes) and as such the exposure they gain through the media exaggerates their minority view.

To conclude, any suggestion to reduce the number of hounds or prevent the use of horses will make the whole process considerable less efficient and I suspect they hope the mounted packs will then simply give up as they are unable to control fox numbers efficiently. If they achieve this, they can then turn their attention to the other forms of fox control and perhaps move onto their next crusade eg shooting.

I would therefore respectfully ask you uphold the current legislation as is, which ensures sufficient protection to animal welfare yet allows the continued efficient fox control. It is clear that those undertaking fox control with mounted packs respect the current legislation, hence the lack of successful prosecutions despite the degree of unwarranted attention by hunt saboteurs.

Yours sincerely

Mark and Jane Fleming

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