

**Submission of evidence in respect of the Review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002**

Submitted by P Blair, Factor, Lothian Estates

I have lived and worked in the countryside for over 50 years. During that time I have appreciated the important role the Hunt have played in the control of foxes.

As a land manager, I have often contacted the local Hunt in order to obtain their assistance with the control of foxes which have caused huge problems to the farmers during lambing time. The Hunt staff liaise closely with me and the farmers letting us know when the problem will be seen to and confirm once they have visited. It is vital to have an organised body such as the Hunt to control vermin such a foxes. They have an in depth knowledge of the countryside they look after and know the habitat well. They are also organised and accountable. We have recently brought all the shooting in hand on the area we manage to ensure that we know who is walking around the farms and if the legislation is changed and the Hunt disbands, we will be back at square one with too many people with guns on the land who are unknown to us. We know the Hunt staff and feel comfortable that they are controlling vermin in a knowledgeable, safe and accountable manner. If the legislation changes then I no longer feel that this would be the case. It is vital for the safety of everyone walking in the countryside and for the protection of wildlife that the role of the Hunt is not weakened. They play an important part in the framework which is in place in the countryside to ensure that the fox population is managed in a humane and accountable way.

I believe the review is to look at current legislation to ensure that it gives the necessary protection for foxes and other wild mammals and allows effective and humane control when required.

**Does current legislation give the necessary protection for foxes and other wild mammals:**

I believe it does as there are local registered packs throughout the country. These packs are organised, have detailed knowledge of the land they manage and the habitat and follow a code of practice. They are accountable and there is a consistency of infrastructure throughout the countryside. They know all the farmers and are answerable for their actions.

If a decision is made to limit the number of dogs used to flush foxes to guns this would have worrying results. The hunts would disband and it is likely that single guns with a limited number of dogs would take over the control of foxes. This would result in more foxes being killed inhumanely, more people walking round the countryside with guns and less control by any landowner. In some rough terrain, it would make it impossible to flush foxes from cover if just a limited number of dogs were used. In these areas if there were no hunts as we

know it, foxes would just be shot which gives them no sporting chance and often results in them being wounded and not killed swiftly leading to a slow lingering death.

Does the present system allow effective and humane control when required.

Yes – the Hunts follow a code of practice. As referred to above, if disbanded, there would be a growth in people with guns and a couple of dogs trying to control foxes. No consistency, no accountability and little control.

Does the law need changed ?

There is no public demand for change of the law. It is only because of the proposal to amend the Hunting Act in England and Wales to bring it in line with our legislation that has kindled this review. Why change something which is working well in practice.

The aim of the Scottish Government has been to enable as many people as possible to enjoy the countryside. The fox control by the Hunts enable a broad cross section of people living in the countryside to meet and socially interact while providing a valuable service to farmers.