



Dear Lord Bonomy,

31-03-2016

It is my understand you are to review the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 and that your scope already sets out the need for control, I will therefore avoid unnecessary arguments and take this opportunity to make comment for your consideration when reviewing the current legislation.

I ride out with the Berwickshire Foxhounds but take no place in the flushing or the killing of foxes. However, given my many years of experience I am ably placed to judge how effective the use of hounds are in the finding and flushing of foxes to guns and believe it to be the most efficient way to achieve the required outcome.

Hounds work by scent, and can locate foxes even in dense cover, such as gorse or bracken or thick woods etc, place where no other means of legal control will be of use ie night shooting or snaring.

It is my understanding that all Scottish Foxhound packs operate under a strict protocol linked to the Act. In accordance, mounted hunts diligently liaise with farmers and land owners over whose land they cross to seek their express consent. In other words It is those parties who are directly affected 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 counterproductive in terms of efficient fox control and minimising stress to the fox. It is my understanding that the Welsh Farmers Hill Packs commissioned research on the subject and that this research is subject to peer review.

There is also I understand some suggestion that those wishing to amend the law would like to see a distinction between those controlling the hounds on horseback wearing red coats and other such foxhound packs operating throughout Scotland. 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.

The **Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)** and Police Scotland provide evidence to support an acceptable conviction rate for incidents which breach the current legislation although very few actually involve the deliberate hunting of a fox and even fewer involving mounted

foxhound packs. This is despite almost persistent monitoring by 'antis' and a regular (indeed welcomed) police presence. This is because the mounted foxhound 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.

I believe that those wishing to see the legislation amended do so with political intent. With the admission and acceptance of circa 100,000 foxes killed on the roads without a campaign to somehow limit this demonstrates the complete lack of concern for the fox.

To conclude, any suggestion to reduce the number of hounds or to further restrict the operation of flushing to guns will make the whole process considerable less efficient and create a “de facto ban”.

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.

Yours sincerely

Clare Stewart