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8th July 2008

Franck David Esq
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Sent by email: franck.david@scottish.parliament.uk

Dear Mr David,

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1124

The Scottish Estates Business Group (SEBG) appreciates the opportunity to respond to Petition PE1124 which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 to introduce provisions to ban the manufacture, sale, possession and use of all snares.

SEBG believes that while the debate on snaring involves a range of interests and organisations, it is landowners who, as employers and owners of natural habitats, play a pivotal role in ensuring that the management of Scotland's countryside is of the highest standard and that best practice is demonstrated at all times.

Animal welfare is an important issue for all those working in the countryside. So too, is the protection and preservation of Scotland's biodiversity and natural habitats. The damage that foxes and rabbits in particular cause to habitat and the threat to endangered ground-nesting bird species such as capercaillie, golden plover, lapwing and blackgame from predators is real and extensive. If snaring were to be banned, the management of upland moorland in Scotland for the benefit of ground-nesting birds would be impossible to carry out effectively, putting at risk a number of listed species such as the hen harrier and other moorland nesting birds such as the red grouse.

Appropriately-used snares also have a key role to play in the ability of Scotland's National Parks to meet their statutory obligations to conserve and enhance natural heritage. Furthermore, sound management techniques are important to Scotland's sporting economy.

The Group would have major concerns for good practice in land management if professional land managers were to be denied the tools with which to carry out their role responsibly. If land managers are to be able to carry out their vital roles as supporters and enhancers of natural biodiversity and to support wildlife, then they must be allowed to use the tools which enable them to do that responsibly.

SCOTTISH ESTATES BUSINESS GROUP

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SEBG believes it is essential that the practice of snaring is carried out to the highest standards. It welcomed the announcement by Environment Minister Michael Russell on 20th February that he intended to tighten the regulation of snaring in Scotland and to ensure it was practiced to the very highest standards. The Group feels the Minister has struck the right balance between animal welfare concerns and the need to enable land managers to do their jobs sensitively and effectively. The responsible use of snares is an important land management tool, particularly in terms of conservation and the protection of declining bird species as well as protecting the Scottish sporting economy which delivers real benefits to our rural communities.

Alternatives to Snaring

There is no effective, selective alternative to snaring that would operate 24 hours a day. Given Scotland's terrain, a snaring ban would leave shooting as the only effective tool available to land managers for the management of wildlife. Rifles are not a ready alternative to snaring in all areas. They are inappropriate in those areas of Scotland where vegetation is too high, and in the uplands in particular, health and safety reasons mean shooting is not practical for control of foxes. Snares act as restraining devices for 24 hours a day and are checked every day. The alternative of an employee with a gun would require a 24-hour watch, impractical even in the best of weathers and certainly unfeasible in the worst.

SEBG believes it is essential to balance the humane treatment of wild animals with nature conservation and biodiversity objectives and the practical needs of good land management. For the reasons set out above, the Group would urge the Committee to recognise that the banning of snaring would be a step too far in that it would have significant negative consequences for Scotland's natural environment.

Conclusion

Given the importance of snaring to rural sustainability, SEBG commends the Scottish government's proposals for retaining the use of snaring, with tighter regulation under a revised and stricter industry Code of Practice, to support best practice in nature conservation, biodiversity and land management. A ban on the use of snares would have major negative consequences, not only for the protection of many of Scotland's iconic and endangered species, but also for the economic sustainability of Scotland's rural areas.

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SEBG
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