

SCF response to the Minister's letter to RACCE Committee: Petition PE01490 control of geese

Thank you for the chance to respond to the letter from Paul Wheelhouse to the RACCE dated 1 October 2014.

I have to reiterate our response to the last letter from Scottish Government on this issue: "we think that the lack of funding for control programmes having been at the root of the escalation of numbers, there is still no pledge to commit adequate funds to this problem. It is estimated by those with far greater expertise than SCF that it would take £75,000 per year for the next 3 to 5 years to hope to bring the Greylag population in the Uists under control. The Scottish Government commitment falls far short of this."

In fact the Minister's letter does not adequately address the issue of funding at all. The RACCE specifically asked for issues of funding to be made explicit:

"The majority of stakeholders raised concerns in relation to the level of funding to support AMP's."

"Committee understands that the goose management element of the project is now being carried out on the Uists through the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) pilot but the Committee heard it was estimated that to keep the crop protection element of the Machair Life project going it would cost between £75,000 and £80,000 with SNH agreeing to fund £45,400 of this for 2014-15. Stakeholders expressed concern that the reduced level of funding would mean the good work achieved by the project will soon be reversed."

"The Committee recognises the success of the Machair Life project and is keen to ensure that the benefits achieved are not eroded. The Committee considers it would be beneficial to continue to run a fully funded crop protection scheme in the Uists until it can be demonstrated that AMP's are effective in protecting crops. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government works with SNH and other stakeholders to find a way to secure the additional funding required to continue the crop protection element of the Machair Life project on this basis. **The Committee looks forward to hearing how this has been progressed.**"

The Minister's letter does not elaborate on how this has been progressed. Nor did it appear to address the direct recommendation of the RACCE:

"The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government reconsider its approach to the funding of goose management programmes and allocate additional resources to crop protection and Adaptive Management Plans, ensuring that these programmes follow best practice in terms of stakeholder involvement, management, design, implementation and monitoring."

Thus "PW: 13. I also recognise that funding is under pressure in every quarter. Nevertheless, SNH has provided additional funding for the adaptive management trials, including a crop protection element on the Uists, and the work being done in relation to the Islay sustainable Goose strategy. Scottish Government has also provided additional funding for a second year to allow for an increase in the Islay

scheme funding in recognition that the Islay strategy will take time before it delivers tangible savings to farmers.” Is not detailed enough.

The SCF there fore ask the RACCE to please press the Minister for far more detailed intentions on the funding of wild goose control in the crofting areas.

There were also many omissions of response to direct questions or requests for information by RACCE, too many to be listed here. For example, has Scottish Government received any feedback from its writing to the Netherlands to enquire about the goose management measures that are currently being undertaken?

A very important point was also not responded to: “The Crofting Commission stated that the current size of the goose population in some coastal crofting areas is unsustainable for continuing productive use of crofts, and is a serious disincentive to crofters to cultivate and maintain their crofts which is a legal duty under crofting legislation.”

And we think that the RACCE’s observation “The Committee considers that the current approach and methods of controlling geese require to be reviewed to ensure that goose populations, and their impact on agriculture and the environment, are effectively managed.” was also not adequately addressed.

The SCF therefore request that the RACCE press the Minister for direct answers the issues it has raised.

Thank you for the time and effort you are putting in to this vital issue for crofting and for allowing our participation.