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Rob Gibson, Convenor  
Rural Affairs, Environment  
and Climate Change  
Committee  
Committee Room T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP



17 February 2015

Dear Rob

Thank you for your letter of 5 December following the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's evidence session of 12 November on the control of wild geese arising from the Scottish Crofting Federation petition PE1490.

My detailed comments are in the attached Annex.

With kind regards

**AILEEN McLEOD**



**PETITION PE01490: CONTROL OF WILD GOOSE NUMBERS****Goose species, populations and the international context**

1. With regard to numbers of geese in crofting areas, the Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme provides count data for the UK. It is organised by the WWT with funding from JNCC and SNH. In addition, counts are undertaken to support existing goose schemes and the adaptive management pilots for resident greylag geese. These activities provide some information about all of the goose species summering and wintering in Scotland, but they cannot provide a complete picture. SNH has good data for some areas and limited information about geese at other sites, particularly where they are expanding their range. In response to representations from local crofters, SNH plan to improve their knowledge of the Greenland Barnacle goose population on the Uists and survey this population to gather more comprehensive data about its size to provide baseline information over the next year.

2. NGMRG carries out a review of goose management policy every 5 years so a review would be due this year. This has not been discussed yet by the Group which is still at an early stage in some of the work arising from the 2010 Review. This will be more useful if stakeholders, including SCF, engage with the Group.

3. My officials have written to administrations in the range states of Greenland Barnacle geese and the Netherlands, where goose management techniques were being trialled. To date we have received no response and are considering other avenues of approach.

4. You also ask about goose management on the Solway and in Aberdeenshire. Local farmers are supported by local goose management schemes on the Solway and at the Loch of Strathbeg.

5. The Solway scheme is the second largest goose scheme after Islay and supports a migratory population of approximately 38,000 Svalbard Barnacle geese. The scheme has been successful in retaining geese along the coastal strip and so preventing them from dispersing onto farms further inland. There are 55 farms within the count area covering 7,600 ha. Sixteen farmers, occupying 17 farms, receive payments. Like the other local schemes the Solway scheme is in the final year of its current funding arrangements and has submitted a bid to NGMRG for the next five year scheme.

6. The Chairman of NGMRG and officials visited the scheme, and I met with members of the scheme, earlier this year to hear their concerns over funding.

7. The Strathbeg scheme is a much smaller scheme which operates in the spring only when the level of agricultural damage from migratory geese is at its greatest. The scheme operates by scaring geese off winter cereals and onto sacrificial pasture. The scheme area supports geese on a designated site, covers eight farms over 16.5 sq km and six farmers have taken up membership of the scheme. The scheme supports pink-footed geese which are highly mobile in their feeding habits with up to 53,000 geese passing through the area on their migration.

## Goose management schemes and the Machair Life Project

8. As referred to above, goose management schemes are currently in the final year of their current funding. Local groups were invited last year to bid for support for the next five years. Current funding for local goose management schemes and adaptive management pilots is set out in the tables below.

### Budget for Local Goose Management Schemes: Cash costs from 11/12 to 14/15

Scheme	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Islay	£735,000	£868,258	£935,719	£935,719
Kintyre	£77,245	£80,628	£80,628	£80,628
Solway	£184,250	£178,125	£173,125	£168,125
South Walls	£16,230	£16,230	£16,230	£16,230
Strathbeg	£60,000	£12,000	£12,000	£12,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,072,725</b>	<b>£1,155,241</b>	<b>£1,217,702</b>	<b>£1,212,702</b>

### Adaptive Management Pilots for Greylag geese: Cash costs supported

	2012/13	2013/4	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Total (£)
Orkney	17,500	18,000	19,500	18,000	18,000	53,500
Uist	1,800	2,000	62,600	45,400	35,400	147,200
Tiree	0	2,000	23,700	17,700	17,700	53,600
Lewis & Harris	0	0	22,790	18,250	18,250	59,290
Additional monitoring budget	0	0	0	9,000	9,000	18,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,300</b>	<b>22,000</b>	<b>128,590</b>	<b>108,350</b>	<b>98,350</b>	<b>331,590</b>

9. Furthermore, additional funding was made available for research in relation to developing the Islay Sustainable Goose Management Strategy. This amounted to £43,000 in 2013/14 and £106,000 in 2014/15. Further expenditure is planned but has yet to be confirmed.

10. Clearly, bids for funding exceed the budget available and there are ever growing demands on budgets across wildlife management. I do not anticipate additional funding being made available.

11. Regarding the Machair Life Project I would like to reiterate that there is a crop protection element within the adaptive management pilot for the Uists, and although the funding is lower than under the Life project, scaring is less costly because the pilot practices lethal scaring rather than non-lethal scaring. The Uists pilot receives a higher level of funding than the other pilots in order to deliver an exit strategy for the Machair Life project.

12. In any case, Life Projects focus on species of conservation concern, priority species that are in unfavourable condition. This does not apply to the geese with expanding populations that are causing damage. So Life is not a good vehicle for funding additional measures that are being considered in relation to most goose species in Scotland.

## Adaptive Management Plans

13. The current policy is based on national goose policy informed by regular reviews and guided by NGMRG, but the local approach allows for the development of schemes suited to local needs. Their governance is, therefore, a combination of local goose management groups at the local level and SNH at the national level, and informed by the information and advice that stakeholders supply via NGMRG and other means. Additional monitoring requirements have been identified through this process and SNH has allocated appropriate funding for their delivery including additional funds for damage monitoring and crofter perceptions survey work. The adaptive management pilots have improved with experience and I am sure that the pilots are now pursuing best practice. However, budgets remain under considerable pressure and there are substantial demands on funding for goose management and other wildlife management.

14. On scaring methods, officials and scientific advisers are considering what research options might be pursued although this is at a very early stage. In addition the Islay strategy will yield useful information on scaring methods and diversionary feeding.

15. On training, please see a table below which sets out progress made in relation to the adaptive management pilots and principally the necessary qualifications required for the sale of wild goose meat.

AM Pilot	2012/13	2013/14
Orkney	December 2012: 7 stakeholders attended a practical demonstration and review of shooting methods to consider safe use of non-lead shot.	July 2013: 3 shooters completed the Wild Game Meat Hygiene Level 2 (FSA) training.
Uists	N/A	February 2014: 7 persons trained in Meat Hygiene as above
Lewis & Harris	N/A	November 2015: 45 persons trained in Meat Hygiene as above
Tiree	N/A	No training conducted as yet. LGMG to organise when they are ready.

16. Training has been arranged for the AM pilots in meat hygiene controls, to enable hunters to sell wild goose meat. Where this training has been arranged, the LGMGs have had the opportunity to have additional training in shooting methods and the use of non-lead shot if they wished it.

## **Data gathering, the environment and public health**

17. All pilots are carrying out monitoring of agricultural damage, methods vary according to local circumstances but monitoring focuses on damage to silage or cereal crops. The Islay Strategy is intended to reduce damage so monitoring is an important part of the Strategy. Damage will be monitored via sward height measurement.

18. The provision of hunting bag data was considered by the Parliament in the course of the WANE Bill. A proposal for a compulsory bag return system for geese was discussed but withdrawn due to there being significant flaws in the proposal. Ministers proposed the development of voluntary scheme instead and a group was formed to develop a reporting scheme for all gamebirds and wildfowl. Agreement on the principles of such a scheme was reached and proposals are due to go Ministers shortly.

19. There are restrictions in place on the use of lead shot over wetlands to protect waterfowl. These restrictions are observed in the course of goose management schemes. The Lead Ammunition Group was set up in England by Defra and BASC to examine the effects of lead ammunition on the environment and food safety. Ministers will wish to consider the Group's findings when they are published.

20. Clearly, heavy fouling will deny pasture for a time to grazing animals. There has also been discussion about possible disease risk from geese. It is known that geese, like other birds, can carry various pathogens but it is thought that the overall risk they pose are likely to be lower than other species e.g. carrion feeders, gulls and garden birds, which, through their feeding and social behaviour, have been shown to be more likely to be exposed to higher levels of the bacteria involved. Diagnostic surveillance centre data is fed into the UK 'VIDA' database which is designed to alert authorities to 'hotspots' for particular diseases. Currently, our veterinary advisers are not aware of any reports to indicate an above expected incidence of, for example, Salmonella abortion or Avian TB in livestock.

21. Scottish Water is investigating the causes of eutrophication and its impact on water supply and water management on Orkney and has liaised with SNH on Orkney in the course of this work. There is no output from this project to date..

## **Market opportunities**

22. I would like to reiterate my predecessor's comments about taking account of legitimate concerns over avoiding the possibility of commercial exploitation of wild geese. This was underlined by the European Commission when they were last consulted on permitting the extension of sale of wild goose meat to additional areas.

23. Whilst I would not like to see any of the current controls relaxed, clearly there is no harm in seeking to market a greater proportion of wild goose meat available. On Orkney a high proportion of the available goose meat has been marketed, but the proportion is lower elsewhere. Local goose groups should consider initially what might be done to increase sales where wild goose meat is available.

24. Sport shooting does make a significant contribution to the adaptive management pilots. Average figures for the pilots are provided below and a projection for the Lewis & Harris pilot. Actual numbers are reviewed each year in response to the count data.

### Resident greylag populations, current populations, target range and annual take

Island	Population at start of Pilot	Target population range	Average number of birds to be shot per annum (total)	Average number of birds to be shot per annum through Pilot	Average number of birds to be shot by sport shooting /under licence
Orkney	21367	9000-11000	5500	2500	3000
Tiree & Coll	3003	1650-2200	1275	850	325
Uists	9650	3600-4400	2600	1650	2700
Lewis & Harris	8650	2500 - 3100	1950	1450	500
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,670</b>	<b>16,750 – 20,700</b>	<b>11,325</b>	<b>6,450</b>	<b>6,525</b>

(Extract from Adaptive Management Sub Group Paper 2 – 30 September 2014)

25. There are no proposals to look at sporting rights in relation to crofting land within the Land Reform Bill. I would urge SCF to engage with NGMRG and to present evidence as to the nature and extent of the problem.

**Scottish Government**

February 2015