

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



29 May 2015

Dear Rob,

Thank you for your letter of 17 February following the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's evidence session of 1 April on the control of wild geese arising from the Scottish Crofting Federation petition PE1490. Please be assured that I have no wish to evade any of the Committee's questions on goose management.

My detailed comments are in the attached Annex. However, I would like to make a general point, and reiterate what Paul Wheelhouse said in his letter of 1 October 2014. National goose management policy is informed by the 2010 management review which concluded that, given limited resources, the management of protected geese should be a priority. This reflects the fact that land managers face greater constraints over goose management measures where they are dealing with protected goose species. In situations, such as the Uists where the goose impact is from quarry species, land managers have substantial control over goose numbers and goose scaring and I would encourage farmers to participate fully in this activity.

I recognise the difficulties faced by farmers and crofters from the impact of geese in certain areas of Scotland. I also believe that Ministers are currently devoting significant resources in terms of staff and budgets to this problem. I would also like to add that the budgetary situation is at least as difficult now as it has been in recent years.

Goose management is complex and affects a range of interests. It is not just a problem for Government, which is why I would ask that the organisations which do not currently attend the national goose group, such as the Scottish Crofting Federation, participate fully so they can help inform the development and implementation of goose policy to address the complex issues arising from goose populations across Scotland.

I hope the further detailed information supplied in the Annex is helpful to the Committee in its further consideration of the issues and concerns raised in the Scottish Crofting Federation Petition PE 1490.

With kindest regards

Aileen

AILEEN McLEOD

PETITION PE01490: CONTROL OF WILD GOOSE NUMBERS

1. There is no desire to evade questions or provide incomplete information. While this is a complex subject I am keen to provide as much comprehensive information as I can that is helpful to the Committee in addressing members' concerns. My reasons for mentioning Islay is that the island hosts a large number of geese and is at the forefront of developing techniques to manage their impacts. It is also within a crofting county and to describe goose management in Scotland without reference to Islay would provide a rather unbalanced view. The Committee has also asked for information on the management of geese outwith the crofting counties.
2. I agree that it is important that we learn from and collaborate with other countries. However, I can confirm that my officials have not received any reply to their letters or reminders and are considering alternative avenues of approach.
3. I note the Crofting Commission's comment about the legal duty imposed on crofting tenant and owner-occupier crofters under the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993, not to "misuse or neglect" the croft, where neglect is so that the croft is not managed so as to meet the standards of good agricultural and environmental condition referred to in the CAP Schemes (Cross-Compliance) (Scotland) Regulations 2004. Sanctions available to the Crofting Commission include termination of tenancy provided this is in the general interest of the crofting community in the locality of the croft.
4. The Crofting Commission view indicates a significant impact of geese in certain areas. However, the comment implies that the Government is responsible for goose management, whereas this is not the case. Goose impacts over much of the crofting counties are caused substantially by resident greylag geese and as quarry species these can be controlled by land managers within the open season and under licence in the closed season. In these situations, Scottish Government and SNH are assisting farmers and crofters to establish effective co-ordination of the management of these quarry species through the adaptive management pilots but this has to continue to be a partnership approach.
5. The proposed five year review of national goose policy was discussed at the last NGMRG meeting on 23 March. This is to be carried out in-house and will be led by SNH with representative organisations from the national group contributing.
6. In implementing new goose management techniques the Committee has identified the conflict between prompt action and gathering full baseline data. SG and SNH have also tried to proceed on the basis of consensus through the national group and, in the case of adaptive management pilots, through assisting local interests to develop solutions suitable for local conditions. The pilots will run until 2017 and be reviewed. The aim will be to find long term solutions that maintain populations at acceptable levels which minimise agricultural impacts and that can be managed in the long term by local land managers.
7. The situation regarding goose numbers, species and value of damage is quite different on Islay and the Uists. Islay suffers from concentrated and significant impacts from protected Annex 1 goose species, which constrains management options, resulting in a damage valued at over £1.5m. The policy is to focus limited resources on protected geese. Nevertheless, the adaptive management pilots use a

small budget to assist local crofters and farmers to prevent serious agricultural damage from resident greylag geese, the populations of which can be controlled by land managers.

8. The current adaptive management pilot on the Uists is not directly comparable to the previous Machair Life project, although it does incorporate a crop protection element within it. The current pilot is more effective as it focuses on reducing the population substantially, thus leading to a decrease in impact of geese on crops, and hence a reduced need for crop protection. Additional savings have been achieved through the co-ordination of the control being undertaken by SNH staff. This has allowed us to achieve protection for crops currently, as well as population control measures to reduce the problems in future, in a more cost effective manner.
9. Methods of data gathering on agricultural damage have been developed by SASA, and are being introduced across all the Adaptive Management pilots. This will allow us to demonstrate the impacts of reducing populations of geese on agricultural productivity and inform future management support requirements.
10. With regard to the sale of goose meat, I believe the position has been clearly set out. I believe we have a good balance of safeguards whilst allowing the sale of goose products under EU authorisation. I would not wish to see the provision for limited sale widened further as I am mindful of concerns about over exploitation of wild geese.
11. I apologise for the error in the table (Resident greylag populations etc – extract from ASMG Paper 2 – 30 September 2014) in my previous letter. An amended version is included below.

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	425
Uists	9650	3600-4400	2600	1650	950
Lewis & Harris	8650	2500 - 3100	1950	1450	500
Total	42,670	16,750 – 20,700	11,325	6,450	4,875

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

12. The national goose group did consider whether sport shooting could make a contribution to goose management and concluded that it did make a useful contribution where this was already occurring but it would be extremely difficult to encourage further sport shooting for the purpose of providing additional goose control; as population control activity is generally targeted out with the main sport shooting season.
13. Finally, I have been asked to clarify the position with regard to the Lead Ammunition Group (LAG). The Group was set up in England by Defra and FSA to examine the effects of lead ammunition on the environment and food safety. In March 2010 Defra invited John Swift, then CEO of BASC, to Chair the group and suggested terms of

reference. John Swift is not employed by BASC and is no longer a member. In November 2010 Defra announced that they could no longer provide secretariat support for the group. Dr Matt Ellis took over as secretary at the following meeting in April 2012 due to his availability and knowledge of the subject.

Scottish Government
May 2015

