

News Release

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Wildlife Bill and Deer Management Planning; A Missed Opportunity?

The Scottish Government has recently published its proposals for new deer legislation as part of the draft Wildlife and Natural Heritage Bill. In the view of LINK Deer Task Force (representing the interests of landowning non Governmental organisations on deer management), we are concerned that the proposals do not offer a serious improvement to the current voluntary approach to Deer Management Planning, organised by the network of Scottish Deer Management Groups. We believe that the current voluntary approach to deer management planning has been given a chance over at least a decade or more and has proved largely ineffective, as evidenced by the recent Scottish Government response to Parliamentary questions on this subject. We think that Deer Management Groups need enhanced Scottish Government support to deliver effective deer management planning as part of wider sustainable land use planning and delivery of public goods.

We understand that deer are a valuable national natural resource, subject to management by humans in the absence of natural predators. As such, clear and binding arrangements should be put in place to ensure that cull and other targets are met and reported upon, rather than relying on good will and luck.

Alongside private sporting rights to shoot deer lies a responsibility to manage them for 'public' benefit (the environment, society and the economy as a whole). Instead of the current voluntary deer management planning system, LINK supports the principle of statutory deer management planning. Under our approach deer management plans would be produced by Scottish Natural Heritage with the engagement of both private and public stakeholders. This process would recognise the need to safeguard protected nature conservation areas as well as the wider countryside, including native woodlands, heather moorland and peatlands. Climate change mitigation, prevention of erosion and maintenance of water catchment areas are further important public considerations in the way deer are managed. Serious damage to these features and interests can occur when where deer are not managed sustainably, notably in the uplands. We believe that Deer Management Plans should be produced to an agreed standard, with cull targets based on best scientific evidence.

The recent Scottish Government response to Parliamentary questions have revealed how the current voluntary system has failed to deliver. There is currently no formal requirement for Deer Management Groups to report to Scottish Government on their activities and less than half of Deer Management Groups

have a Deer Management Plan. In 2005, the latest data available, revealed that just over 10% of Deer Management Groups had a formal system for setting cull targets.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, Convener of the LINK Deer Task Force said “Deer Management Groups were not established to fulfil the purpose that is now required of them to meet the public interest. We support a new system of statutory deer management plans fit for the 21st Century and integrated with other sustainable land use practice. There is a large amount of public interest at stake in the way deer are managed and this needs to be properly resourced and steered by the Scottish Government. We believe that current Scottish Government proposals simply do not go far enough”

He added;

“During the course of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill next autumn, Scottish Environment LINK will be pressing the case for statutory deer management planning supported by adequate public resources”

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Editors' Notes

(1) Scottish Environment LINK is the network for Scotland's voluntary sector environmental organisations. LINK has over 30 member organisations spanning interests across the natural environment and associated cultural heritage and supported by around 500,000 people. Further information on LINK is available at www.scotlink.org

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