

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 4DF

19 March 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

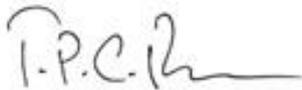
General Licences for Stoat Control

I am writing to you with regards the general licences for stoat control that were circulated by Natural England on 18 March. These are for the purpose of conserving wild birds, and to prevent serious damage to livestock, including poultry and reared gamebirds, and as you will have seen from the letter that you have been sent by the Chairman of the National Gamekeepers Organisation, they are unfit for purpose.

With only 12 days until the new licences come into effect, urgent action needs to be taken immediately if we are to be able to continue to trap stoats as we do now, with no additional restrictions, as intended by Defra's implementation plan for the Agreement of International Humane Trapping Standards. This is of particular importance given that at this time of year, ground nesting birds are at their most vulnerable, and we cannot have a repeat of last year's fiasco over Natural England's handing of the three General Licences for controlling wild birds.

You will recall that that particular debacle necessitated the then Secretary of State taking back the decision making powers with respect to the three licences in question. One would have thought that Natural England would have learnt from that, and consulted stakeholders prior to circulating these new licences for stoat control, and it is therefore extremely disappointing that this has not been the case. Although Natural England has acknowledged that stakeholders may have queries with the licences, and will therefore be inviting them to call in order to discuss these, it has stated that it is not anticipating making any changes in advance of their issue for 1 April. Given the flaws within the licences, the changes highlighted by the National Gamekeepers Organisation must be made, and you are therefore asked to give this matter your personal attention.

Yours sincerely



Tim Bonner  
Chief Executive  
Countryside Alliance

Copy to:  
Marian Spain  
Interim Chief Executive  
Natural England