



2026 mid-year Highlight Report



A message from Jake Swindells, Director for Scotland

As we look back on 2025 and the Scottish Parliament election of May 2026, one thing is abundantly clear: the rural voice has never been more vital. With a new parliamentary session underway, there is a renewed opportunity to ensure that the needs of Scotland's rural workers and communities are heard, understood, and acted upon.

For too long, policy in Holyrood has been driven by a "Central Belt" perspective that fails to grasp the reality of life in our glens, hills, and coastal communities. Whether it is the complexities of the new muirburn licensing or the ongoing pressure on our traditional land management practices, the Scottish Countryside Alliance (SCA) has been your front-line defence. We have spent the last year ensuring that evidence—not emotion—sits at the heart of the legislative process.

I am particularly proud of the grit our community has shown. When the government attempted to strip shoots and deer forests of vital rates relief, we didn't just complain; we lobbied, we presented the facts to government officials, and together, our sector forced a partial u-turn. While this was a significant moment, our message to the Scottish government remains: "Not nearly far enough."

Beyond the political corridors, the Scottish Countryside Alliance continues to celebrate the heart of our community. From crowning our 2026 "Rural Oscar" champions in Edinburgh to the incredible success of our Winter Coat Appeal, where your generosity provided warmth to hundreds of vulnerable people, we have yet again shown the heart of our shooting and rural community.

Over the past year, we have defended the interests of Scotland's rural communities at every level of government, challenged legislation that threatens livelihoods, and ensured that practical experience remains at the heart of policymaking.

Thank you for standing with us.



2026 Highlights



30+ MSPs

and election candidates engaged
since January 2026



**2 rural hustings
organised**



**300+ winter
coats donated**



Representation

on key government
advisory groups



Successful lobbying

on Small Business Bonus
Scheme relief



2026 Awards

reception held in Edinburgh

Our objectives

As the new parliamentary cycle begins in Holyrood, we seek to engage with each MSP, new or old, to highlight our four core campaign pillars:

Protect Scotland's rural way of life and rich heritage

Land management must integrate both traditional practices and modern regeneration. We work to ensure that licensing schemes (such as wildlife management and muirburn licences) remain workable and fit for purpose.

Connect rural Scotland

From digital connectivity to transport, rural communities cannot be left behind. We campaign for practical solutions to rural depopulation.

Grow the rural economy

Local, independent businesses are the backbone of rural life. We are campaigning for a 'Blue Tractor' scheme to ensure consumers can buy Scottish produce with absolute confidence, alongside promotion of high-quality venison across the public sector.

Support our countryside with rural proofed policies

Aspects of healthcare, policing and housing should be decentralised. We want streamlined planning policies that support small-scale developments and affordable rural housing, plus community health hubs that bring medical and dental care closer to home.

The next Scottish government must reconnect with rural voters.

"Rural Scotland needs policy that matches its commitment with clarity, confidence, and common sense, giving communities, land managers and field sports the space to succeed, invest, and plan boldly for generations ahead together"

Graham Simpson, MSP, Reform UK

**Read the full Scottish
Parliamentary Election
2026 manifesto now**



"Shooting is a vital part of our rural economy. It supports jobs, tourism and local businesses, and those involved have deep knowledge of our landscapes and communities"

**Tim Eagle, MSP, Scottish Conservative
and Unionist party**

"We will continue to take a balanced approach in areas such as wildlife management and on issues such as muirburn. Through initiatives such as the wildlife forum, we will work to build consensus and ensure policy is driven by the latest evidence"

**Jim Fairlie, Minister for Agriculture,
Marine and the Islands**

The next chapter – our 2027 goals

- ♦ Deliver a workable licensing system for The Hunting with Dogs Act following significant improvements during the last 12 months.
- ♦ Champion and promote field sports, ensuring that Scotland is fully recognised as a world-class destination.
- ♦ Secure a legally mandated Rural Community Impact Assessment for every piece of legislation proposed in Holyrood.
- ♦ Launch a Fishing for Schools pilot programme in Scotland.
- ♦ Introduce venison to secondary school menus starting in North Lanarkshire.

Our key messages

Hunting

Throughout 2026 and on to 2027 we will continue to work with members to ensure that the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act stays relevant and is fit for purpose. Following sustained engagement with government and NatureScot, we have secured ongoing improvements to the Hunting with Dogs licensing process.

Through close working with our members, NatureScot and the Scottish government, we are refining the licensing scheme so that it meets the needs of land managers undertaking predator control for environmental benefit and to protect livestock.

Shooting

As a representative shooting organisation, we have consistently engaged with parliamentarians on key legislation.

We led on securing the deregulation of sound moderators across England, Scotland (except airgun moderators) and Wales, when the government were about to kick the proposal into the long grass. Moderators are officially now deregulated and are classed as an inert piece of shooting equipment and do not have to be stored securely.

Following intensive lobbying by the Scottish Countryside Alliance and our partners, the Scottish government relented on their plan to strip all shoots and deer forests of Small Business Bonus Scheme (SBBS) relief. Deer forests are now eligible for relief once again, provided the management contributes to the human food chain. While this is a welcome step, it is not nearly far enough. We continue to fight for full relief for all small shoots that provide vital conservation and economic value to Scotland.

Land management

The delayed muirburn licensing scheme will be implemented in autumn 2026. Wildfires are becoming a regular occurrence in Scotland, and we continue to work with stakeholder groups to ensure that rural communities are resilient and ready for any future wildfire outbreaks.

General Licences are also reviewed annually and we responded to the more detailed Scottish government consultation relating to species that may be or are already included.

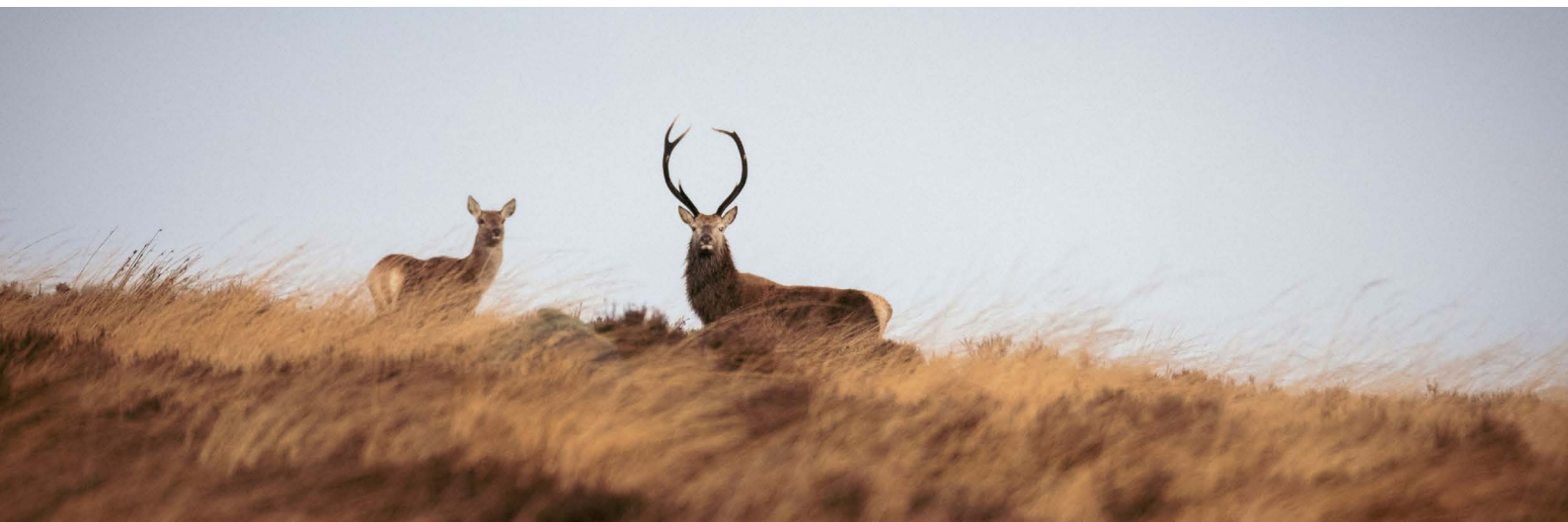
“Muirburn is a critical upland management tool and we recognise its importance in supporting a mosaic of habitats, enabling grazing and gamekeeping activity and in supporting wildfire mitigation”

Jim Fairlie, Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands

Deer management

The original Deer Management Nature Restoration Order's (DMNROs) have effectively been absorbed into broader new deer-management intervention powers under the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act. Scotland has moved from a system that intervened mainly to stop damage, to one that can intervene to achieve desired ecological outcomes through the use of Deer Management Plans (DMPs). This is a fundamental shift in the relationship between private land management and the broader and more subjective state-directed nature restoration. NatureScot's discretion has been expanded substantially from previous interventions.

NatureScot and the Scottish government are now working on implementation details, guidance, codes of practice, and associated regulations. We will continue to engage and will input via the Deer Management Round Table group.



Rural communities

Rural crime

The Countryside Alliance have devised a Rural Crime Map for people to use to record crimes in their local area. The data collected from this project will be used to inform Westminster and Holyrood governments and signpost barriers to reporting rural crime incidents across the UK.

We sit on a number of committees including the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime Scotland (PAW Scotland), the Firearms Licensing and Explosives Practitioners Group and the Hare Coursing and Poaching forum. We work closely with Police Scotland, NatureScot and the Scottish government on rural crime policy in Scotland.

Buildings (Heating and Energy Performance) and Heat Networks (Scotland) Bill

The proposed Buildings (Heating and Energy Performance) and Heat Networks Bill is expected to return after the 2026 election. The legislation seeks to reduce carbon emissions from heating systems and strengthen powers relating to heat networks. We will monitor the Bill closely and ensure that any new requirements are practical and affordable for rural households.

The “Shooting Community Cares” Winter Coats Appeal

Over the 2025/26 winter, our Scottish Committee member Jamie Culpan launched a pilot clothing donation project for the homeless. The generosity of the Scottish rural community was overwhelming.

- ♦ **The impact:** More than 300 high-quality winter coats and outdoor items were donated across nine drop-off points in Scotland.
- ♦ **Distribution:** The items were distributed via Simon Community Scotland and Churches Action for the Homeless (CATH) to vulnerable individuals in Glasgow, Edinburgh, North Lanarkshire and Perth and Kinross.
- ♦ **Next steps:** Following the success of the 2025 pilot, we are hoping to roll this out as a permanent nationwide initiative for the 2026/27 winter.

“This campaign is a shining example of the kindness and cohesion found across Scotland’s countryside – delivering genuine warmth where it’s needed most”

Jamie Culpan, SCA Committee Representative



Countryside Alliance Awards 2026

It is one of the highlights of the year to welcome all our finalists to Edinburgh for the Countryside Alliance Awards Scottish Reception. Rural businesses the length of Scotland are nominated by their customers for a "Rural Oscar" in one of five categories: butcher, pub, local food and drink, rural enterprise and village shop/post office. The winners from each category go on to the grand final at the House of Lords to compete against winners from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We are now in our fourth year of running the awards in Scotland and we are proud to acknowledge all the businesses nominated.

"As most people are aware, rural businesses are really struggling at the moment. We need to be on the map, we need to have a unique selling point and we just need support"

**Kym Clements, Wanlockhead Inn,
Dumfries and Galloway**

"We're very grateful for winning the Countryside Alliance Butcher category in Scotland. We've put a lot of hard work into the business and spent a lot of time really pushing the industry as a whole"

Ryan Briggs, Butcher, Jedburgh

"We are delighted to win this award as a small, rural business on an island. It can be really challenging running a business in a rural area but we are just so grateful that we have so many fantastic customers who nominated us, who voted for us. We have fantastic staff who support us in everything that we do"

Helen MacDonald, Browns, Tobermory



Join today

What your membership pays for: Your voice, your protection

Everything in this report has been made possible by our members and your membership is the fuel that drives our campaigns. Every pound is reinvested into protecting the countryside and ensuring our community remains resilient against political and economic challenges. We ensure the countryside has a voice in the national conversation



1. Expert political lobbying

Fighting bias:

We provide an evidence-based counterpoint to policy approaches that often reflect a central belt perspective rather than rural realities. We also challenge extreme animal rights and vegan campaigns where they conflict with science, sustainable land management, and Scotland's rural economy

Direct access:

We sit on government advisory committees for deer management, firearms licensing and the Muirburn Code

2. Community and social impact

The "Rural Oscars":

Celebrating the best of Scottish rural businesses and taking our champions to the House of Lords

The Winter Coat Appeal:

Coordinating nationwide logistics to get high-quality outdoor gear to those in need

Fishing for Schools:

Transforming the lives of disadvantaged children and young people by taking them out of the classroom and into the countryside

3. Media and communications

Challenging misinformation:

Rapid-response rebuttals to biased reporting in the Scottish press

"My Countryside" magazine:

Expert insights, policy updates and stories from across the UK delivered to your door

Digital advocacy:

Maintaining the platforms that allow us to mobilise thousands of members for "e-lobbying" campaigns at a moment's notice

4. Gold-standard insurance and protection

£15 million public liability insurance:

tailored specifically for all recognised field sports, including shooting, hunting and many other rural activities

Legal support:

Access to our team of experts for guidance on licensing disputes and legislative changes

Free will-writing:

A partnership with Farewill to help you protect your family's future and your legacy (A £100+ value)

"The ongoing work of the Countryside Alliance is vital in ensuring the concerns, livelihoods and interests of the countryside are kept in the public domain and defended against misinformation and prejudice. Keep up the good work"

Charles H

"I have lived in the countryside all my life and have worked in many jobs outside. We love what we do, although it is hard work, and I feel the Countryside Alliance is the only representation we have against the town people that want to alter everything"

Les B

About us

The Scottish Countryside Alliance is the political campaigning force dedicated to promoting and protecting the rural way of life. Following a period of major political shifts in Holyrood, our message remains clear: policymaking must be balanced, evidence-based, and genuinely rural proofed.

Much of our work in early 2026 focused on preparations for the Scottish Election in May. During this period, we engaged with candidates from across the main political parties to ensure rural voices were represented in the political process.

We are committed to ensuring that the new SNP government listens carefully to those working on the ground and delivers policies that meaningfully represent the needs and challenges facing rural Scotland.



Contact:

Jake Swindells, Director for Scotland.
Email: Jake-Swindells@countryside-alliance.org

Jill Stewart, Campaigns Officer.
Email: Jill-Stewart@countryside-alliance.org



Countryside Alliance, Countryside Alliance Wales, Scottish Countryside Alliance, Countryside Alliance Ireland and Fishing for Schools are trading names of The Countryside Alliance Foundation, a registered charity in England and Wales (Charity No. 1121034).

Registered address: China Works, Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SJ