

7 February 2018

## **Countryside Alliance Parliamentary Update**

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### **Highlights**

#### **CA agrees draft Animal Welfare Bill needs a rethink**

A House of Commons [report](#) has recommended major changes to the draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill which was published by Environment Secretary, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, at the end of last year. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee has recommended separating the two components in the draft Bill on sentience, and increased sentencing, and the need to carry out an impact assessment on the changes being proposed. The Countryside Alliance [written evidence](#) to the EFRA Committee was used in the report and we have also made a [submission](#) to the Defra consultation on the draft Bill.

#### **Aspiration must be matched by action in 25 Year Environment Plan**

The [25 Year Environment Plan](#) is an impressive attempt by the Government to recognise the environmental challenges of our age and we fully support its objectives. However, in attempting to be as comprehensive as possible the Plan lacks detail about how these objectives are going to be delivered and by whom. The Government must work with all of those involved in the management of the countryside otherwise the aspirations for improvement of our natural environment will fail to become a reality.

#### **Support for hunting remains strong**

Hundreds of thousands of people, either on foot or mounted, lined streets and market places across the country on Tuesday 26 December for the [Boxing Day meets](#) of over 250 registered hunts in the UK. [A survey of registered hunts](#) has found that 70% of hunts have more women hunting and 54% have more young people than they did ten years ago, pointing to a bright future for those involved in lawful hunting. The Prime Minister has confirmed what the Government announced in July last year that the hunting issue cannot be resolved under this minority Government, but this does not change the fact that the Hunting Act is a bad law passed for the wrong reasons.

### **Debates**

#### **Banking in rural areas – 8 February**

A Backbench Business Debate is due to take place tomorrow on a “motion on community bank closures”. The Countryside Alliance has called for digital connectivity and skills to be improved to ensure those living and working in rural areas are able to access banking services online. Our briefing note is available [here](#).

#### **Agricultural policy framework – 1 February**

A Westminster Hall Debate took place on “The policy framework for agriculture after the UK leaves the EU”. The debate was an opportunity to outline the importance of farming to rural communities and the main requirements for a new agricultural policy to replace the EU’s CAP. Our briefing note is available [here](#).

#### **25 Year Environment Plan – 29 January**

The House of Lords held a debate on the “Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan”. We called for greater recognition of the role of those who farm, fish, and shoot in conservation work, and the need to work with them to achieve the objectives of the Plan. Our briefing note is available [here](#).

## Select Committees

### Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Committee published its [report](#) following pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Animal Welfare Bill. Chairman of the Committee, Neil Parish MP, commented: “the Bill has been rushed and the legislation has suffered as a result.” There was universal agreement that the Bill should not proceed in its current form.

The Committee has also announced it is to re-open an [inquiry](#) to investigate whether the labour situation faced by those working in agriculture, horticulture and food production has improved or deteriorated over the past year, and we will be submitting written evidence in due course.

### Environmental Audit Committee

The Committee has launched an [inquiry](#) into the ambition and overall approach of the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan, and we will be submitting written evidence in due course.

### Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The Committee has launched an [inquiry](#) into the social impact of participation in culture and sport, and we will be submitting written evidence in due course.

## Rural Communities

### Government gives green light for legal right to broadband

There is hope for the 1.1 million rural homes and businesses that still can’t receive decent broadband as the Government has rejected the voluntary offer from BT to deliver broadband, and will instead give individuals the legal right to demand 10 Mbit/s by 2020. The decision to implement the Universal Service Obligation for broadband contained in the Digital Economy Act means that broadband providers will be required by law to provide high-speed broadband to anyone requesting it, subject to a cost threshold. Our press release is available [here](#).

### Environment Secretary sets out future for agriculture

The speech by the Environment Secretary, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, at the Oxford Farming Conference last month confirmed the move away from area based subsidies towards payments for delivering environmental and public goods by 2024. Attempts to reform the CAP have been slow and Brexit creates an opportunity for the UK to create our own farming policy for the first time in more than 40 years and move ahead of the pack. An editorial from our Chief Executive on the speech is available [here](#).

### Judging underway in Countryside Alliance Awards

Judging of the regional finalists is underway in the 13<sup>th</sup> annual [Countryside Alliance Awards](#). Regional winners will be announced in the Spring and invited to a reception in the House of Lords on 25 April where the national winners will be named. MPs with regional winners will be notified and invited to attend the reception. Thank you to all parliamentarians who have nominated rural businesses.

## Shooting and Conservation

### CA campaign for ‘fair and consistent’ firearms licensing

The Countryside Alliance has been at the forefront of work to resolve the increasingly chaotic situation regarding the medical procedures associated with firearms licensing. Our Head of Shooting, Liam Stokes, featured in a [BBC Countryfile](#) investigation last month and following the broadcast we launched our [Campaign for Fair and Consistent Licensing](#). Almost 3,000 people have sent emails to the Policing Minister, Rt Hon Nick Hurd MP, copied to their MP about the issue. A FAQs briefing note is available [here](#).

### Ilkley’s curlews the latest victim of online animal rights activism

Despite the best efforts of the Countryside Alliance, the Labour Group on Bradford Metropolitan District Council has voted to end grouse shooting on Ilkley Moor, the last publicly owned grouse moor in the country, although this decision is being challenged. We have sent an [open letter](#) to the Council calling on them to maintain current levels of funding for conservation work and to carry out monitoring of the wildlife on the Moor. Previous experience has shown that withdrawing management can have negative consequences for other vulnerable species, particularly the curlew and other ground nesting birds.

### **Wildlife law essays**

In light of our decision to leave the European Union the Countryside Alliance is asking the question '[Where next for nature?](#)' We have invited individuals and organisations from a range of backgrounds who have a wealth of experience and knowledge of the countryside and wildlife to help inform and stimulate this important debate in a collection of essays. The full essay collection can be viewed [here](#).

### **CA responds to Home Office air weapons review**

The Countryside Alliance has responded to a Home Office air weapon review with a firm rejection of further restrictions to a popular and growing sport and useful asset in pest control. The Countryside Alliance's response points out that proposals on introducing further legislation, changing security and manufacturing requirements, and implementing additional restrictions for under-18s, are unnecessary as all appropriate measures have already been legislated for. Our press release is available [here](#).

## **Away from Westminster**

### **Charles Jardine's marathon fishing challenge**

Three fisheries and a 60 mile run in 24 hours is the challenge faced by Fishing for Schools Director Charles Jardine in his latest fundraising scheme – [The #WessexWaterChallenge](#). All money raised will go to [Fishing for Schools](#), the initiative set up the Countryside Alliance Foundation 10 years ago, which introduces children to fishing. Charles would be grateful for your support.

### **Registration for C4R open**

[Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland](#), the unique fly fishing charitable programme which offers fly fishing retreats as therapy for ladies with breast cancer, is delighted to announce its [six residential retreats for 2018](#). Applications for the first three retreats of the year are now open and more information on how to apply, including deadlines, can be found [here](#).

### **Fishing for Schools 2017 review**

The Countryside Alliance Foundation project Fishing for Schools celebrated 10 years of introducing children to fishing in 2017. The project Director, Charles Jardine, looks back on a busy year which has seen an increasing number of schools involved in the project and a reception in Parliament. Charles's report can be found [here](#).

## **And Finally...**

### **Love of Shooting**

To mark the end of the game shooting season on Wednesday 31 January, we have been asking people to share their best shooting photos on social media using the hashtag #loveofshooting.

**For more information on any of the articles please contact:**

#### **James Legge**

Head of Political

[James-legge@countryside-alliance.org](mailto:James-legge@countryside-alliance.org)

0207 840 9263

#### **James Somerville-Meikle**

Political Relations Manager

[James-sm@countryside-alliance.org](mailto:James-sm@countryside-alliance.org)

0207 840 9262