



PRESS RELEASE
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RURAL ORGANISATIONS APPEAL FOR CARE OVER NEW ANIMAL WELFARE LEGISLATION

Rural organisations today appealed for parliamentarians to ‘legislate with care’ as they face an 11th hour bid to outlaw the control of mountain hares in Scotland.

The following organisations released a joint statement as the Scottish Parliament prepares to consider the final stage of a new animal welfare bill tomorrow (Wednesday): The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC), the Scottish Association for Country Sports, the Scottish Countryside Alliance, the Scottish Gamekeepers Association and Scottish Land & Estates.

“Our organisations fully support the Scottish Government’s objective in bringing forward Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill. Wildlife crime and animal cruelty have no place in Scotland.

“However, we are extremely concerned that 11th hour attempts are being made to introduce amendments which are not relevant to the main part of the Bill and would result in very poorly considered and deeply flawed legislation.

“We are particularly concerned about amendments tabled by the Scottish Green Party that would afford protected species status to mountain hares. This amendment does not take account of the extensive scientific work that has been carried out in recent years to help ensure the protection of the species.

“Mountain hares are already controlled in season to protect trees and fragile habitats, to prevent disease and to manage tick populations which also have implications for human health.

“There has been a vast effort across the rural sector to develop the monitoring of the hare population and it is our strong belief that a last-minute amendment to a bill does not give what is a complex issue the appropriate level of parliamentary consideration. The last thing we need at this time is poorly considered and scrutinised legislation, when there are a number of alternative options available that would more effectively benefit the hare population. We would urge all parliamentarians to draw breath and consider these options.

“In particular, we are concerned that the tabled amendment does nothing to address the main issue; why mountain hare numbers have fallen in poorly managed areas where they once thrived. Instead the amendment threatens hare numbers in well-managed areas where they currently flourish.

“Mountain hares reach their highest densities in the world in Scotland, and the highest densities in Scotland are on land managed for grouse shooting. Significant sums of taxpayers’ money have been spent to find and test the best counting model for hares. This was willingly embraced by land managers. Conversely, the adoption of good quality monitoring of hares away from moors has been poor, and that is where the problem of mountain hare conservation in Scotland now lies.”

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