

Petitions Committee (jointly with Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee)

Oral evidence: Grouse shooting, HC 670

Tuesday 18 October 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 20 October 2016.

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Members present: Helen Jones (Chair); Steve Double; Oliver Dowden; Catherine McKinnell; David Mackintosh; Paul Scully; Chris Davies; Jim Fitzpatrick; Simon Hart; Ms Margaret Ritchie; David Simpson; Angela Smith; Rishi Sunak.

Questions 1 - 83

Witnesses

I: Dr Mark Avery, petition creator; and Jeff Knott, Head of Nature Policy, RSPB

II: Amanda Anderson, Director, The Moorland Association; and Liam Stokes, Head of Shooting, The Countryside Alliance

Written evidence from witnesses:

Dr Mark Avery (GRO0248)

The Countryside Alliance (GRO0288)

The Moorland Association (GRO0308)

The RSPB (GRO0304)

Examination of witnesses

Dr Mark Avery and Jeff Knott.

Q1 Chair: Can I welcome to the Committee this afternoon Dr Mark Avery and Jeff Knott, who have agreed to give evidence to us? As you know, we shall be debating soon both the petition to ban driven grouse shooting and the petition asking for it to continue. The aim of the sessions we are having this afternoon is to gather as much factual evidence as possible, which will help to inform the debate. We are grateful to you both for giving us your time this afternoon. Can I kick off by asking you, Dr Avery, please, to explain to us briefly why you started with the petition to ban driven grouse shooting and why you think that is a necessary action?

Dr Avery: Driven grouse shooting has five main problems with it. It has animal welfare problems, nature conservation problems, wider environmental problems, wildlife crime problems and problems of social inequity. That is a unique combination of problems. They do not apply to other aspects of shooting. I feel, and clearly 123,000 other people feel, that something has to change. The driven grouse shooting industry has shown no sign of wanting to reform. It is up to Parliament to create that change. Perhaps slightly naively, I believe in parliamentary democracy. I believe that, if the people bring a strong enough case to Parliament, then Parliament should act. That is why I am here.

Q2 Chair: Do you want a ban just on driven grouse shooting or on all forms of grouse shooting, and if not, why not? Can you explain to us the difference?

Dr Avery: Just driven grouse shooting, because that involves the most intensive types of land use, particularly burning of heather and culling of native wildlife. That is the one that is the problem. I am not against all shooting. I am not even against all duck shooting, which I would not be terribly keen on but would not want to see banned. This is a very specific hobby. That is all that driven grouse shooting is: shooting birds for fun, which I believe has benefits for a few but disbenefits for the wider public and for the environment. I do not see any way of tinkering with it, so that is why I would like to see it banned.

Chair: Thank you for outlining that to us. My colleagues will now want to explore that in a bit more detail.

Q3 Oliver Dowden: I have a question for Mr Knott. I understand the RSPB has argued in favour of a licensing regime and not a ban. Why do you favour a licensing regime over a ban?

Jeff Knott: First, it is important to say that the RSPB is neutral on the ethics of sport shooting. We only get involved in questions around shooting where there is an impact on the objects of the society, and that generally means conservation impacts. We favour licensing as the option



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because we agree with much of Mark's case around why change is necessary: that intensive driven grouse shooting as currently practised is environmentally damaging in a range of ways. We might explore some of those examples shortly.

We favour licensing as an option because we think that all legislative tools have not yet been tried and that you should do that first. Licensing we think has the potential to drive up standards within the shooting industry, to the point that we are delivering benefits for the widest possible range of people, wildlife and the environment, rather than simply eliminating it.

Q4 Oliver Dowden: How would that licensing work in practice? What would it look like?

Jeff Knott: There are various models that you could look at. The rod licensing system currently in place is one. Basically, what it would look like is that you are saying the licence to operate is not a right to operate in driven grouse shooting; it is a privilege, and that privilege can be taken away if an individual moor is not operating by the standards that society sets. That could have as many or as few lines in it as was decided to be appropriate, but would presumably start with compliance with the law in terms of killing of protected birds of prey.

Q5 Oliver Dowden: You talk about an individual moor, so would the licence attach to the moor or would it attach to the gamekeeper? How do you envisage that? Who is the regulated person under your proposals?

Jeff Knott: It would have to operate at the level of the shoot, at the level of the moor. There was a previous system that was got rid of in, I think, 2007, which operated at the individual level, and that was largely ignored. The RSPB did not object to that system being withdrawn at the time because it was not effective. Essentially, what we see in a licensing system is a way to provide a much more effective deterrent such that, rather than a small fine or a court case, we actually have the opportunity to remove the right to operate over a given area of land. That has the potential, we think, to provide a greater deterrent and to drive up standards so that we are getting the benefits we need to see.

Q6 Oliver Dowden: Who do you see policing that? Presumably that will involve a cost. Who do you think should bear the cost of that?

Jeff Knott: Other models of licensing have a small fee being paid, so for rod licences fisherman pay the cost of the fee and that can cover expenses. You could look to keep expenses down through running an online system. Yes, it would require policing and would require enforcement. We already have significant investment, although not enough, I may hasten to add, going into trying to enforce the existing laws. It is not proving effective, either to protect protected birds of prey from illegal killing or to tackle the wider environmental issues associated with intensive management.



Q7 Oliver Dowden: Have you done any analysis of the potential cost of that?

Jeff Knott: Not in terms of the detail of the cost, no. That is something we would say could be done through the process as we are looking and developing it. Certainly, in lots of other areas, it can be done at a cost-neutral level, so that there is not a cost to society as a whole.

Oliver Dowden: You mean not a cost to the Government.

Jeff Knott: Yes.

Q8 Oliver Dowden: Can I ask you, Mr Avery, what your view is? Presumably you advocate banning over licensing. Why do you think that licensing will not work?

Dr Avery: Licensing could work, but I do not think it would. It would be difficult to come up with a set of licence conditions that would be strict enough. An example of that would be the entry-level scheme that applied, which was not licensing but a grant scheme, to agriculture across England. It was a great idea, but actually delivered very little, because it was not set up well enough. Vested interests, in that case the NFU, watered down what farmers got money for.

It is okay in principle to say we could set up a licensing system; it is difficult to get a good one in practice. The second one would be the cost of it, as you have said, and I wonder who would pay. Wildlife crime is a crime already and a licensing system would not really help to solve that. The best thing that could be said for the licensing system is that it would fail and then one would have to come back to banning it. I would go straight to banning it.

Q9 David Mackintosh: A number of conservation enthusiasts have suggested to us that grouse estate owners should be held accountable for wildlife crimes committed by their estate managers and gamekeepers. What do you think of this suggestion, either one of you?

Jeff Knott: This is the idea of vicarious liability, and we think this is something that absolutely merits exploring as well. It has been introduced in Scotland, and while it is early days there have been the first couple of successful convictions and we think it has started to have a greater deterrent effect. It is clear that, whatever route we decide to take, whether it is licensing or whether it is vicarious liability, there are two real things we will have to accept: that the status quo is not an option and that voluntary approaches have failed. We need to look at tightening legislation around this. Whichever model you take, both have potential benefits.

Dr Avery: I would hope the SNP, or at least Scottish MPs, most of whom are SNP these days, would speak in the debate about whether vicarious liability has worked in Scotland. That would be useful to hear. Vicarious liability would be a step forward, but it still depends on catching people



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breaking the law, and that has been the difficulty in enforcing the current law. It would act as a deterrent because there are various well known, high profile, titled grouse moor owners who, if their gamekeepers or staff were doing anything wrong, would not want to appear in court to have to answer charges. But I do not think it would be enough on its own.

If vicarious liability came in, and that is perhaps the minimum that the Government could do to show that they were actually moving to tackle this issue, then it would have to be accompanied by an investment in a lot more satellite tagging of birds of prey, because that will create the evidence of crime on the ground. I would like to see £500,000 a year be invested for the next 10 years in tagging. I would like to see that money given to enforcement agencies rather than nature conservation agencies to build up the body of evidence of where birds are being killed, how they are being killed and by whom.

If you think that 5 million quid is too much to spend on this, then you might agree with me that we ought to move to a ban. We have to do something. I would agree with the RSPB that the status quo is not acceptable. Vicarious liability on its own will not move things forward very much, but it would be a step forward.

Q10 David Mackintosh: You talked about Scotland. How well do you think it is working there?

Jeff Knott: It is very early days so it is a bit early to judge, but the fact that there have been the first couple of convictions is a positive step. The lesson from Scotland so far is that vicarious liability alone is not a magic bullet, but it is a positive step in the right direction. As Mark says, it will be interesting to hear Scottish perspectives on that, but I think most people suggest it has been a good step. It is one we should absolutely carefully consider south of the border, alongside other options such as licensing.

Dr Avery: I agree.

Q11 David Mackintosh: Do you think there are any other legal alternatives that could help to reduce wildlife crime?

Jeff Knott: There is a range of possible options, starting with greater investment in enforcing the laws we already have. The key thing to look at is ways that we can increase the deterrent value. The three that I would pull out are licensing, which we have already mentioned, vicarious liability, and the third one is related to agri-environment payments going into grouse moors and attaching a few more strings to that. That is something that is very intermittently enforced at the moment. We know that over £100 million over 10 years is going into areas of grouse moors to support sometimes environmentally damaging management practices. That gives a potential lever and one that we should look at carefully as well.



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Dr Avery: It is very difficult to detect wildlife crime in the uplands of Britain. We need to use new technology, and I would say satellite tagging of birds of prey would be an answer.

Q12 **Rishi Sunak:** Mr Knott, the Committee has received a lot of submissions about the impact of vegetation burning in grouse moors and elsewhere. I would be interested to get your thoughts. Where have you seen examples that there are conservation benefits from selective vegetation burning?

Jeff Knott: We see burning, particularly on deep peat areas, as an environmental ill and a net negative impact. That is because it can release carbon stored in the peat stores. Peat areas store more carbon than forests. That can be released into water, which is what are called dissolved organic carbons: the brown colour that you get in water in many upland areas, which has a cost then to water companies to remove, which is passed on to the consumers. Some of that carbon ultimately ends up in the atmosphere with climate change impacts.

Burning on deep peat areas can also dry out bogs which can lead to potential for greater risks of downstream flooding, particularly at areas of high peak flows. We would see that burning, particularly on those deep peat areas, as something that has a negative environmental impact.

Q13 **Rishi Sunak:** Has the RSPB ever advocated burning in other areas for conservation of other bird species: that it could provide a helpful habitat, through selective, targeted burning?

Jeff Knott: We do not burn on deep peat anywhere on our reserve network. There is a small amount of burning that goes on in some areas but never on deep peat.

Q14 **Rishi Sunak:** The second question I had was on regulations concerning burning, and there seems to be some confusion around this area. Can you confirm for the Committee whether there are existing regulations in place that govern and regulate how burning happens when it does happen, especially on sites of specific scientific interest?

Jeff Knott: There are a series of codes of practice in place around heather and grass burning. The enforcement of those can be quite variable, and it is clear that they are not doing enough to address the issue. In the written evidence the RSPB submitted, you will have seen that there are a series of examples of where burning is still going on and appearing to have significant negative environmental consequences.

What is key in that, and I am really pleased that you brought up those questions, is that hen harrier and bird of prey persecution is often the most visible and noisiest element to this argument. It is a much wider issue than that that we are dealing with here. There are significant public interest arguments around water quality, water flow, carbon, access, as well as the range of biodiversity, including birds of prey. Burning is a great example of where, whatever solution we come up with and move



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forward, it needs to consider a wider range of environmental impacts than just birds of prey, recognising of course that those are still very important.

Dr Avery: May I just say something on burning?

Chair: Yes, certainly.

Dr Avery: I agree with what Mr Knott has said. There are some people sitting behind me, who live in Hebden Bridge, who are convinced that the intensity of burning on the grouse moors above the Calder Valley where they live has increased the level of flooding. There is scientific evidence: there is the EMBER study; there are a lot of other papers that suggest burning will increase flood risk. There is the evidence of the Committee on Climate Change to a previous EFRA Committee investigation into soil health, which suggests that burning is a bad idea.

There is also, as Mr Knott has forgotten to mention, the fact that the RSPB has complained to Europe about the intensity of burning across the uplands of Britain.

Chair: I would rather not take point-scoring between witnesses, if you do not mind. Can we stick to the facts?

Dr Avery: That is not point-scoring. I am saying that the European Commission is investigating the UK Government.

Chair: I will decide what the point-scoring is as well, thank you. Carry on.

Dr Avery: The European Commission has taken up a complaint against the UK Government because of the intensity and magnitude of heather burning in the British uplands. That is a pretty serious thing that the UK is facing, and that is still going on. There is a wealth of evidence that burning damages the environment in the uplands.

Q15 **Rishi Sunak:** What would your reaction be, Dr Avery, to the Natural England uplands evidence review? It found that “no evidence was identified specifically relating to the effect of burning on watercourse flow or the risk of downstream flood events. If there are any effects, they are likely to be highly site specific.” You made a much more general claim. That review seemed to find that was not the case. Do you think the review has got something wrong, or what have they missed?

Dr Avery: It would be helpful, because we are covering a large amount of ground in a small area, if the EFRA Committee took this subject further. Then you could examine Natural England, and indeed academics from universities, the Committee on Climate Change and a whole load of other experts, on what they think about these issues. This is a big issue and you should talk to the people who have studied it. The EMBER study is a five-year study looking across 10 catchments—if I have your



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attention—which is the biggest study of this subject that has been done. The EMBER study suggests that there is environmental damage.

Q16 **Rishi Sunak:** I was just checking with my colleague on the EFRA Committee, because we have in fact just concluded a study into flooding. I was just checking that, as far as I can recall, we did not receive any submissions on that point.

Dr Avery: My suggestion was that the EFRA Committee might wish to take on the subject of driven grouse shooting and all the issues surrounding it.

Chair: I will leave that to the EFRA Committee to decide.

Q17 **Ms Ritchie:** How common is damage to peat stores on grouse moorland, Mr Knott?

Jeff Knott: Where burning takes place on those deep peat soils, damage to carbon stores can be very significant. That is released, as I said, from this dissolved organic carbon—the brown colouring—which can leak into the water when that burning takes place. Those peatlands are internationally important habitats, and the RSPB believes that the evidence shows that burning on those habitats is not compliant with those habitats being in good condition. That has impacts on carbon, water and biodiversity as well.

Q18 **Ms Ritchie:** You are confirming to the Committee that it is because of the international designations that these peat stores are important and it is important to protect them.

Jeff Knott: Sorry, it is because they are international designations?

Ms Ritchie: It is because of their international designations, not because of their constituent parts.

Jeff Knott: That is part of the reason

Q19 **Ms Ritchie:** What else is there that is important to protect?

Jeff Knott: In peatland areas?

Ms Ritchie: Yes.

Jeff Knott: In terms of the biodiversity, do you mean?

Ms Ritchie: Yes.

Jeff Knott: Breeding waders are often presented as being species that are reliant on driven grouse shooting, but we found that, while they do well on grouse moors and we would happily recognise that fact, they are not reliant on driven grouse shooting. Many RSPB reserves, such as the Dove Stone reserve in the north of England, have healthy populations of things like curlew and dunlin. No burning takes place there, and obviously no grouse shooting either.



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Q20 Ms Ritchie: You have already mentioned the carbon impact as a result of damage to peat stores. Can you give the extent of that damage?

Jeff Knott: There are some figures in our written submission. We have mapped areas where burning for grouse is undertaken in England, Scotland and Wales. As we have said in the written submission, despite regulation to protect those habitats, 44% of burnt squares in England and 28% of squares in Scotland occurred on deep peat soil. That equates to about 3,700 kilometres squared in England and about 2,500 kilometres squared in Scotland. Those are obviously estimates.

Q21 Steve Double: You have already touched on the issue of flooding. I wondered if you would like to elaborate any further on what relationship you believe there is between grouse moorland management and flood risk.

Dr Avery: There is a body of scientific work, which started with the EMBER study. Scientific papers have been published since that study showing that burning of heather allows runoff of water in heavy rain events to happen more quickly. If you are living at the bottom of a valley above a grouse moor that is heavily burned, that means that you face an increased chance of flooding. That is what we know about the biology.

I do not think there are any cases where anybody has been able to look at an individual grouse moor and link it to a flood event, but, as I say, the inhabitants of the Calder Valley would be pretty certain that they have experienced more flooding because of changes to the management in the uplands where they live.

Jeff Knott: What we know is that burning dries out upland peat bogs. Peat bogs are effectively a sponge: they hold water in our upland areas, and if you dry them out they do not hold water as well. The evidence shows that, at the heaviest rainfall events, it increases peak flow, which has the potential to risk downstream flooding.

It is one of those examples where the cost is borne by society as a whole, which is where some of the economic arguments that are sometimes made for the value of driven grouse shooting need to be very carefully considered. What often is not considered is the negative side to that ledger, which is both the public funds going into those areas, which I have already mentioned, and also the costs in terms of removing dissolved organic carbon from water and in terms of cleaning up after flood events. We need to balance those equations very carefully.

Q22 Steve Double: Briefly, is there consensus among scientists on this point or are there other views?

Jeff Knott: You would have to ask a range of scientists about whether there is a consensus or not. I am not sure there is ever consensus among all scientists, but there is certainly strong evidence to suggest that, at the times of the heaviest rainfall events, peak flow can be increased by burning.



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Q23 Angela Smith: I have to declare a range of interests, I am afraid. I am a member of the RSPB, a member of the Wildlife Trusts, which have an interest in these issues, and a member of the National Trust, which is a landowner in my area; it allows grouse shooting on its land. I am also an officer of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Group here in Parliament. I have visited Bowland with BASC and the Moorland Association and will soon be visiting that area with the RSPB as well, and I have significant grouse moor interests in my constituency. That is just to get all of that on the record before we start. It is all there.

I wanted to ask about the science and the research. I have read the extracts from the University of Leeds, the EMBER abstracts and all the work done by the GWCT. Can I ask both of you whether you think there is a need for more research, and I am talking about heather burning particularly now, in this area, particularly on a landscape scale and over a length of time in order to establish some certainty, if possible, on the impacts of burning on grouse moorland?

Jeff Knott: There are always ways the science could be improved. There is always a scope for further research, particularly to look at the rotational aspect of moor burn, which is quite poorly studied. A lot of studies are based around an individual burn and then seeing what happens after you stop, rather than the rotational system, typically. However, I think there is sufficient evidence across the range of impacts that we have spoken about, from flooding to water quality to birds of prey and protected species, to take action now.

If I may make a particular point around what is happening on the ground, we are talking about the intensive end of driven grouse shooting—the intensive end of the intensive style of grouse shooting, if you will. At the moment, we are seeing an even greater intensification of many of these management practices going on. It always used to be said that you needed about 60 grouse per kilometre squared to allow for driven grouse shooting. Across many areas of the north of England, including some in Angela's own constituency, densities are now well over 200 grouse per kilometre squared.

It slightly leads me to say, "How much is enough?" We are seeing increasing strengthening of the evidence around the negative environmental impacts associated with that intensive management. At some point, we have to start looking at legislative controls to make sure we are delivering the wider societal benefits, rather than maximising the number of grouse available, which is a benefit to one particular sector.

Dr Avery: There is quite a considerable amount of evidence that suggests there is a problem at the moment. Rather than immediately jumping to the suggestion that more research is needed, the research that has been done ought to be examined by a group of people who understand it and would then come to a view as to whether more was needed or not. I am pretty sure that they would come to a view that the



evidence we have at the moment is worrying in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, water quality and flood risk.

Q24 Angela Smith: Can I push you slightly on these two points? I understand the whole range of issues. It is not just about water and peak flows; it is about depredation of other species. I am very familiar with the mountain hare in my constituency; it is an absolutely wonderful creature that anybody who knows moorland landscapes will feel very strongly about.

I understand the range of issues, but is it not also the case that what we are talking about is very complex and varied? One piece of moorland is not the same as another piece of moorland. It is a very complex picture that we are talking about here. A blanket bog in my constituency does not necessarily reflect the management needs of another grouse moor elsewhere in the country.

You mentioned earlier, Jeff, the need for perhaps more work on rotational burning. Is there not also a need to establish more clearly the variety of management techniques needed to properly sustain our moorland areas?

Jeff Knott: Possibly, but there are some basic principles that we can answer fairly clearly already. That is where, to bring it back to where we started, licensing has some real attraction for me. As more evidence emerges, you can tweak the system to reflect the latest evidence.

It strikes me that licensing of grouse shooting is sometimes portrayed as being somehow anti-shooting or against grouse shooting. For me, nothing could be further from the truth. Licensing is explicitly focused at driving up standards within the community so that it reflects the latest available evidence and delivers the maximum societal benefits to the widest sector of society. Far from being anti-shooting, licensing is how we help shooting to save itself.

Q25 Angela Smith: Do you think, given the burden of regulation already on the sport of shooting—and there is a range of regulations and laws already—licensing could in a sense codify and simply the approach for the shooting sport?

Jeff Knott: Potentially, absolutely. Licensing is commonplace in other industries in the country and, indeed, in shooting and hunting systems elsewhere in Europe and North America. It can work in lots of other places; there is absolutely no reason why it should not work here. It can be done in a simple way that does not add cost for Government or to the public purse and that delivers value for money. I come back to the basic point that, while in almost any area we would all hope that voluntary systems could work, where voluntary approaches fail to deliver the objectives we need them to, we are left with no option but to look at legal systems. I am afraid that is the situation we are in here.

Q26 Catherine McKinnell: To follow on from that, what impact do you think grouse shooting has on other moorland wildlife? I would be happy for



either of you to answer.

Jeff Knott: It is important to get on the record that grouse shooting can benefit some wildlife. The classic example is ground-nesting waders, which benefit from the legal predator control of foxes and mustelids that goes on.

There are two points that I would make there. One is that hen harriers are ground-nesting birds as well, so theoretically should benefit just as much from that, and yet they do not seem to. Despite there being sufficient habitat for over 300 pairs of hen harriers in England, there were only three pairs this year so, funnily, hen harriers do not seem to be benefiting in the same way. We know the reason: a wealth of scientific evidence shows that it is because of illegal persecution. We see that grouse moor effect on other birds of prey as well.

The other thing to say is that, actually, the benefits that we see grouse shooting can deliver are not universally delivered. It is where I would see licensing as a great tool to drive up the standards, so that we are maximising the benefits, addressing the negative side of the equation where it currently exists and making sure that these areas are delivering the biggest benefit, across the full range of biodiversity, from ground-nesting waders to birds of prey, and the other ecosystem services we have been talking about.

Dr Avery: All the species we see in the British uplands evolved long before driven grouse shooting, intensive heather burning and management came along 200 years ago. All of them live in other parts of the world together, where there is no driven grouse shooting and no intensive management of the same type. These species cannot depend on this bizarre and intensive management regime. Some species benefit and some species do not.

Overall, I think the net effect is for wildlife to lose out. One example that is often given as a species that benefits is the black grouse on grouse moors. Black grouse do not benefit from driven grouse shooting because, if we did not have our hills dominated by a management that suits the red grouse, then we would have a much broader variety of habitats and we would have more black grouse.

That is actually the route that the National Trust is taking in its High Peak Moors Vision for its land in the Peak District, where it is seeking, over the next couple of decades, to move to a less intensive, more natural-management regime, which they believe, and I agree with them, would create more wildlife overall and more variety. It would not be a landscape that is subjugated to the interests of just one species, the red grouse, which is for people to shoot for fun, which is a bizarre situation in our national parks, like the Peak District and the North York Moors.

Q27 **Catherine McKinnell:** Are aware of a study by the Moorland Association that found, in a special protection area in North Wales, when they ended



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grouse shooting, that there was a substantial decline in the numbers of hen harriers, golden plover and curlew? Are you aware of that study and do you think that there is something we can learn from that as well, Dr Avery?

Dr Avery: I am aware of it, but not the details. It seems to me it is an anecdote, rather than a review across the whole piece. Some of the species you have mentioned have declined in Wales for years and years, and are declining in other parts of the country. To link them all to grouse shooting would seem a bit excessive.

Jeff Knott: It rather depends on what comes afterwards; that is obviously key. While, as I have already said, grouse shooting can benefit the species you mentioned, you can also have increasing populations of them without grouse shooting. In fact, we do in several RSPB upland reserves, places like Dove Stone and Geltsdale, which are bucking the national trend. That is really good news, but it depends what comes next. I keep coming back to this point: it is about making sure we end up with a system that drives up the standards to deliver those benefits, without the environmental costs that we are currently seeing.

Q28 **Chris Davies:** First of all, I should declare that I am a member of the NFU and the Countryside Alliance. I am chair of the APPG on forestry and I have grouse moors in my constituency. Following on if I may, and if I may have slight movement on this, Chairman, I am very interested to hear Dr Mark Avery's comments on the Berwyn special protection area because, in my constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire, we have a grouse moor in the Breconshire side of the constituency, where the national park authority came under pressure and decided to ban grouse shooting on the moor, in that particular part of the constituency.

Following on from Mr Knott's comments, no plan was put in place after that; grouse shooting stopped straight away and now that is just a grouse moor in name only, because there are no grouse there and other birds are sadly in decline. In the Radnorshire part, which is just a few miles away, we have a very healthy and thriving grouse moor, which is heavily managed, well kept and grouse and other birds are there, thriving. How do you explain that?

Dr Avery: I do not know the details of the places as well as you do, obviously. The only thing, which is slightly tangential, I could say about Wales is that it has very little driven grouse shooting and it has a thriving and increasing population of hen harriers. That is what you find if you look in different parts of the country. In the north of England, where driven grouse shooting is a major land use, there are, as you have heard, three rather than 300 pairs of hen harriers. Birds of prey are killed illegally, routinely and systematically. I am afraid I cannot comment on the example you give, because I do not know the details.

Chris Davies: You do not, but you want to see driven grouse shooting stopped and banned.



Dr Avery: Absolutely.

- Q29 **Chris Davies:** Therefore, what I have heard from you so far has tended to be based on the privilege of grouse shooting. Let me make it clear: I have never been on a grouse moor for shooting purposes, but I have certainly enjoyed grouse moors. You seem to be coming from one direction, with nothing else to put in place. So long as grouse shooting is banned, you would be very happy. Do you think that grouse moors would really benefit from that, right across the country?

Dr Avery: Those are your words, not mine. I did say that the species you find on grouse moors are found away from grouse moors. They were found on grouse moors before they were managed as grouse moors, and they are found right across the world at these latitudes where people do not have grouse moors. They cannot possibly be dependent on grouse moor management. That is a pretty strong argument. I am afraid I do not know the two places in Wales on which you focused.

Chris Davies: That is a pity.

- Q30 **Oliver Dowden:** I have a very small supplementary to what you were saying. Dr Avery, you used the phrase earlier “people who shoot for fun” and described this sort of bizarre situation. I just wanted to clarify your personal position. Are you against the sport of shooting per se and are these further arguments? You do not see anything inherently wrong with people who “shoot for fun”.

Dr Avery: It is not what I would want to do and I do not think it is the most admirable thing that we do but, no, this is very specifically a petition, signed by 123,000 people, which says ban driven grouse shooting—not all shooting, not all grouse shooting, driven grouse shooting. That is because of this variety of aspects that come together in this sport, but you cannot get away from the fact that it is shooting birds for fun. That is what people pay to do. That is what driven grouse shooting is.

- Q31 **Chris Davies:** Some would say that areas benefit through that. Mr Knott, if I may, the RSPB has withdrawn its support for Defra’s hen harrier action plan. What do you think the Government should be doing and putting in place?

Jeff Knott: We have withdrawn our support for the action plan because, essentially, it had patently shown itself unable to deliver, with the loss down to only three pairs of hen harriers in England this year. I would now like to see the Government clearly acknowledge that we have a problem here; and that, for the good that some grouse moors do, and undoubtedly there is some, there are significant problems. We have explored some of them, but we have barely scratched the surface of them here today, in a very limited time.

I would like to see the Government commit to looking really carefully and in more detail at the evidence underpinning all the various arguments we have heard already and will hear in the next session, in a more detailed



way, coming up with some real recommendations for how we are actually going to move things forward. As I say, the two things that are really clear to me are that change is needed—driven grouse shooting must evolve if it is going to be considered a legitimate part of our uplands, moving forward—and that, to do that, we will have to look really carefully at legislative options.

Q32 Angela Smith: Very quickly, Jeff, the voluntary approach in your view is seen to be failing and I understand entirely why you believe that is the case. They have not bred in my area for a long, long time. Is the prerequisite to kick-starting the voluntary approach all over again—and if these differences could be resolved in a voluntary manner, it would be better—that the killing and the persecution of the birds of prey has to stop?

Jeff Knott: Absolutely. It is undoubtedly the case that hen harriers are primarily rare because of illegal killing and because of wildlife crime. That is, frankly, unacceptable in any modern society, in my view.

We have come a long way. Species like the red kite and the buzzard have recovered spectacularly in the last 30 or 40 years. When I first got into birding, which was not that long ago, I harassed my parents to drive me to Wales to go and see my first red kite, and I see them over my garden on a near-daily basis now. That is fantastic. We have come a long way, and that has only been possible because of improvements in attitude from many shooting estates and land managers in the UK, which have allowed those recoveries to happen.

We have not been able to do the same for hen harriers, and the reason is because of that continuing intolerance on these intensively managed areas of our uplands. If we cannot tackle that, we are always going to be struggling; we are always going to be behind the eight ball, but I think we can. The lesson we have to take away is that voluntary approaches have not been able to deliver this. We have been talking about this for decades. The time is now absolutely right for Government to grasp this, to step in and to drive the changes we need to see.

Q33 Simon Hart: Can I draw the Committee's attention to my declaration in the register as chairman of the Countryside Alliance? I just want to ask a quick question to Dr Avery. In advocating a total ban of this activity, it is legislated that, when we are looking at that option, we have to consider the alternatives and what the impacts of those alternatives are. I am hoping that you might alert the Committee to what those alternatives are, what assessment you have made of them in ecological terms, what assessment you have made of them in economic terms and what assessment you have made of who will actually pay for those changes, should this ban take effect.

Dr Avery: There are quite a lot of things wrapped up in that question.

Chair: Take them one at a time and we will get there.



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Simon Hart: The one central thing is what the alternatives are and what assessment you have made of them.

Dr Avery: We have talked about licensing. We have talked about vicarious liability. We have touched on the fact that the taxpayer is already pouring large amounts of money, through agri-environment funding, into the uplands. I would like to see that money, and indeed more money in terms of agricultural support, going to fund carbon storage, flood alleviation and better water quality so that, instead of having to make money out of driven grouse shooting, landowners are encouraged to make money out of delivering public goods. That is a way of doing it, particularly in national parks.

Q34 **Simon Hart:** I am so sorry that I did not put the question more clearly. I wanted to find out what assessment you have made of the alternatives, ecologically and economically. I am assuming that, because you back the ban, so to speak, those assessments are things that you would have done. We have to consider what the alternatives are, in both economic and ecological terms.

Dr Avery: Let me turn to the economics then, which we have touched on. It is claimed that driven grouse shooting provides an economic benefit to the uplands. I do not believe that is true. There are economic reports from economists that say the industry figures that suggest an economic benefit from driven grouse shooting are greatly exaggerated. They also do not take into account what an economist would describe as the externalities, which are the costs of increased flood risk and increased cost to water customers from treating water quality. The fact that I cannot go to a national park and see hen harriers is a type of economic loss to myself.

If all those things were looked at, rather than Defra just taking the industry's estimates of spend, I believe we would find that there is an economic deficit to society as a whole from driven grouse shooting at the moment.

Q35 **Chair:** Just to come in, do you have any actual figures that you could give the Committee on that? I think that is what we are looking for. If not, would you send them to us in writing?

Dr Avery: No, I do not, but the Defra position is to trot out the industry's figures of benefit, which have been criticised and are clearly partial. As I have said earlier, it would be a great service if the EFRA Committee or Parliament looked at those issues, asked economists those questions and asked maybe the next two witnesses whether they have taken into account the externalities.

Chair: I think we will decide the questions. We would like the witnesses to provide the answers, if possible.

Q36 **Simon Hart:** Only very briefly to say that the question was not about Defra and it was not about the people who support grouse shooting. This



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was about you underpinning your argument in support of a ban. As a basic minimum, would it not be fair to say that a risk assessment or an impact assessment of some sort should have been prepared by you, so you could persuade the Committee? Is that not an unreasonable question?

Dr Avery: I think it is unreasonable to expect an ordinary member of the public to have done a risk assessment that would suit you.

Q37 **Simon Hart:** You are not; you are the former big man in the RSPB. You are putting a petition before us calling for us to outlaw an activity. I would have thought that the very least you could do—I am just suggesting—is come up with what your alternatives are and what your assessment is. That is all I am asking.

Dr Avery: My answer is that this is such a big question and the Defra figures are so poor that Parliament ought to look at what the real answer is.

Q38 **Paul Scully:** Talking about rural communities, do you have a view on how many jobs are associated with driven grouse shooting?

Dr Avery: I do not, only the industry's figures, but then you would have to take into account—it is the same point—how much cost there is from flood risk, how much money is lost from extra costs of water quality and the economic costs of increased greenhouse gas emissions. You cannot simply look at the money spent on an activity to judge whether it is valuable. You have to look at the whole economics of the activity.

Q39 **Paul Scully:** Are those three things your basic tenet of the impact on rural communities?

Dr Avery: Those are impacts on society at large. Rural communities would probably also be much better off if they were allowed to take a different line, which would be rural tourism, and to encourage more people like myself who rarely go into the national parks these days, because they are not the best places to see wildlife. We would like to spend weekends in Angela Smith's constituency, spending our money to go and see hen harriers. I would love to pay £50 to be taken for an afternoon to get a good view of a hen harrier nest. You cannot look at the so-called benefits of this activity by looking at what happens now, without looking at the costs of what happens now and what the potential benefits for the future would be.

Paul Scully: You see the tourism that you described as the main alternative profit-making for a grouse moor.

Dr Avery: I think that would be a very major one and would outweigh the benefits currently experienced by driven grouse shooting. As I said, I think we should pay landowners for ecosystem services as well. That would be more money going into the uplands for public good, rather than for private profit.



Q40 Paul Scully: Can you see any negatives for the rural communities if you had a ban?

Dr Avery: There would be fewer jobs for gamekeepers. That is true, but then my grandfather was a coalminer. There are not many jobs for coalminers. Progress is about moving on and finding new ways to employ people for the current day, not living in the past.

Q41 Paul Scully: You mentioned right at the beginning the five principles for social equity. Were you talking about the flood risks and these sorts of things or were there any other issues that you were trying to pull out, when you mentioned that as a subject?

Dr Avery: No, you have understood me. There are benefits that accrue from driven grouse shooting, but they accrue to few people. There are costs from driven grouse shooting, which are experienced by almost everybody who pays for water and everybody who insures their home, because there is an excess that we are all paying for flood risk: Flood Re. Most of the people who lose from driven ground shooting do not realise that they are losing, because they are unaware of the impact of this.

Q42 Paul Scully: Can I finally ask Mr Knott? You have told us in submissions that the Government should consider alternative forms of management and use of public money to provide a wider range of public goods and tourism income in moorland areas. I wonder if you could expand on that and what you think alternative forms of management and uses of public money might be.

Jeff Knott: Absolutely. For the public money that flows into these areas, we should make sure that that is delivering the maximum possible public good. Mark and the RSPB agree on the nature of the problem. We disagree, perhaps, on the most appropriate solution. I could certainly see an ongoing role for grouse shooting, as part of a more balanced upland economy.

The important thing when you look at the economics—and it is a detailed and complex subject, and I am not an economist—is to consider both sides of the ledger. Yes, look at the economic benefits that can accrue from that form of management, but look at the alternatives, whether it is tourism. We know that things like the Galloway Red Kite Trail in Dumfries and Galloway can bring in significant income. Look also at the costs in terms of treating the environmentally damaging impacts of intensive grouse moor management and balance things out. I think that takes you to a conclusion where you still have grouse shooting, as part of a more balanced upland economy, but a range of interests as well, greater inputs, a more diversified landscape and economy, and more diversified upland communities.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I was going to make the point, with your permission, Chair, that the EFRA Select Committee has announced an inquiry into rural tourism. We have already had a lot of responses. If Dr Avery was not aware of that, he might want to make a contribution to that inquiry.



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Chair: Thank you very much, Jim. That is very helpful.

Q43 **David Simpson:** Dr Avery, in your written evidence, you told us that the Government's responses are "marked by complacency and denial about the scale of the problem and Defra's responsibility and ability to tackle it." Could you expand on that for the Committees?

Dr Avery: That is in three areas, really. They are: ecosystem services, this carbon storage, water quality and all that business; the economics; but also wildlife crime. We have touched on the first two, but Defra has not treated the economics of driven grouse shooting sensibly. They have just looked at the benefits, the spend, not the costs. Their responses have said that the uplands are very important for ecosystem services, but they have not recognised a whole body of evidence that shows that driven grouse shooting harms those ecosystem services. It is almost to say the Defra response was written by the grouse shooting industry, the way it is phrased.

On wildlife crime, we have not moved forward. Birds of prey—and it is not just the hen harrier; it is the peregrine falcon, the golden eagle in Scotland, the white-tailed eagle in Scotland, red kites, goshawks—have been protected in law since before I was born. A private Member's Bill in 1954 became the Protection of Birds Act. They are still killed routinely and systematically in the uplands of Britain. We have moved on, as Mr Knott said, in the lowlands, but not in the uplands. It is not just a problem just for the hen harrier; it is a problem for all birds of prey.

The scale of wildlife crime is enormous. It is not a few bad apples. You do not get from what ought to be an English hen harrier population of 300 pairs to three pairs this year from a few bad apples. This is a massive problem, which Government are not tackling. The Government response says, "Well, we've carried on funding the National Wildlife Crime Unit. That's it." There is nobody in the world who believes that the National Wildlife Crime Unit and its current level of funding will crack this problem.

Q44 **David Simpson:** You have hit on the response from the Government. What would you like to see in the response?

Dr Avery: I would like to see driven grouse shooting banned, because this whole range of issues is so complicated that we could muck about with the individual bits and we will end up banning it eventually. On wildlife crime, which is an issue for the current Government, which would claim to be the party of law and order, you cannot just leave it as it is. You could bring in licensing, which I do not think would work. You could bring in vicarious liability, which of itself I do not think would work, but it would work better and quicker if backed up by an investment in enforcement, which means more satellite tagging of birds, so that you find more bodies on more grouse moors, more quickly, and build up an even more compelling case that this whole industry depends on and is underpinned by wildlife crime.



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I do not regard driven grouse shooting as legitimate. I do not mean that every grouse moor is killing birds of prey, but there is so much wildlife crime going on, coming out of grouse moors, that the whole business has not reformed itself. It is very difficult to enforce the law. I would like to see it gone, but vicarious liability with an awful lot more investment in satellite tagging would move us in that direction.

David Simpson: Your ultimate goal in all of this is to see grouse shooting banned.

Dr Avery: I suppose the driven grouse shooting industry could change its way of looking at its sport. Instead of it being about killing huge numbers of birds, it could be about killing large numbers of birds, in which case there could be a way that nature conservation and environmental wellbeing could live more hand in hand with driven grouse shooting, but we have been having that discussion for more than 30 years. It has not just started.

We had meetings when I was conservation director of the RSPB; we had meetings with the Environment Council, which was a kind of reconciliation and arbitration service, for seven years or so. We have seen no progress from what I regard as an intransigent industry that is stuck in a Victorian age and has not moved on. In fact, things are getting worse. You can see why I, and maybe 123,000 other people, for a fairly obscure subject, have lost patience with an industry that cannot clean up its own act and are losing patience with a Government that fail to act as well.

Q45 **David Simpson:** The last question, Jeff, is to you. I noticed when Mark was talking that you were twitching a little bit. I am not trying to drive a wedge, but there was a wee bit of twitching. Anyway, what did the RSPB make of Defra's response?

Jeff Knott: I would categorise Defra's response a little differently. I would characterise the Government's response as one that keeps all options open to them. The key challenge now for the Government is to actually grasp this subject. There has possibly been a feeling for a while that this is a niche area; it is about hen harriers; it is something that can be put in a small box and considered at a later date. We now have here a much bigger, much wider issue that really is about the public interest in our uplands as a whole. I would like to see the Government grasp that by looking at it in detail. That could be Government; it could be the EFRA Committee looking really carefully at the tools.

Let us be absolutely clear: the RSPB does not want to see an end to shooting. The RSPB does not want to see an end to grouse shooting.

Dr Avery: Nor do I.

David Simpson: You said you wanted it banned.

Dr Avery: That is driven grouse shooting.



Jeff Knott: We want to see an end to environmentally damaging management practices. I would say that the best way to consider that is to look carefully at licensing, to look at vicarious liability and to come up with a plan. That is not an anti-shooting position. It is not an anti-grouse position. It is an anti-environmentally damaging position. Far from being anti-shooting, I think looking at licensing and vicarious liability is how we give the right tools, so that we can secure the future of shooting. I would be looking not just to Government for leadership, but to the good people within the shooting community to stand up and lead us into that position. They should be championing licensing and the role of regulation, as much as the RSPB.

Q46 **David Simpson:** This is the final point: what discussions have you had with the Government in relation to the licensing regime?

Jeff Knott: We have been putting to the Government for quite a while vicarious liability, and licensing more recently. In all honestly, I do not think it is an issue that the Government have really grasped to date. I hope that, if nothing else comes out of this session and the debate on 31 October, it convinces the Government that they have to take these issue seriously and that we really need to grasp them. Ultimately, the one thing that everyone can agree on is that the status quo is not an option. For our hen harriers, for our upland communities, for our wider biodiversity and for the environmental services we get from these special places, we need to see an improvement and we need to see change.

Chair: Thank you very much. We are vastly overrunning our scheduled time, but lots of my colleagues wanted to ask you questions. Can I thank both of you for your evidence this afternoon? As usual, if there is anything vitally important that you thought you did not get a chance to say and you want to send that evidence in to us in writing, please feel free to do so. Thank you very much for the moment.

Examination of witnesses

Amanda Anderson and Liam Stokes.

Q47 **Chair:** Can I welcome Liam Stokes, who is the head of shooting at the Countryside Alliance, and Amanda Anderson, who is the director of the Moorland Association? Thank you again for coming this afternoon.

You will know that we are dealing with two petitions, one for banning driven grouse shooting and one that argues that grouse shooting should be protected, which has a far lower number of signatures, over 20,000 when I last looked. Why is it, do you think, that there is more support for a ban? Amanda, do you want to try to explain that to us?

Amanda Anderson: First off, I would say, of the petitions to ban driven grouse shooting, the one that is before you today is the third attempt. The first attempt reached about 20,000 in a year. Liam, you might



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correct me, but the one that is running now I think has been going for a couple of months.

Liam Stokes: It has been running for two months. It was started by a gamekeeping student doing his NVQ at college with no support; it has just gone out to the community and, in the space of two months, 20,000 people have signed up wanting to protect grouse shooting. You could argue that a more reasonable comparison would be to compare that to the first effort to ban driven grouse shooting, which was before the BBC presenters and the rock stars, with social media and what have you, got involved.

The first petition was a community petition. 20,000 people signed it in a year. A community petition for grouse shooting, in two months, has 20,000 signatures. All I am saying is that we have to be very careful to what extent we judge public perception on the basis of the petitions in front of us.

Q48 **Chair:** Well, you are talking to politicians who are quite used to judging these things. Let us be honest: there are a lot of people calling for a ban on driven grouse shooting. Do you think that is because they simply do not understand the mechanics of it or are they highlighting a problem that needs to be addressed, in whatever way you seek to address it?

Liam Stokes: No one is going to dispute that there are certain issues that the public are interested in and there are issues that the grouse shooting community is interested in as well. Our interests align in trying to sort out those issues. Picking apart your question, there are undoubtedly people who have clicked that petition, clicked a hyperlink on the basis of seeing it on Twitter and social media. It is an unfortunate fact of the way public discourse occurs today, but that is not to say that there are not some issues that the public are concerned about and we are concerned about too.

Amanda Anderson: Thank you for the opportunity to come and tell you all about the voluntary continuous improvement that is happening on the moors. We have listened very carefully to some of the concerns. I would not agree, for one minute, that burning is entirely responsible for drying out peat bogs. We have had thousands of kilometres of drains dug into the peaks; that was 100% Government-incentivised, as recently as the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Our moorland managers realised that this was not good for the natural habitat that they conserve. Wild grouse lives in heather moorland. If you do not conserve its habitat, you will not have the grouse. When they have seen peat on their moors being washed away down eroding grips, as they are called, they have been blocking them up for 15 or 20 years.

I would like to say that Government have been taking this very seriously and we have an agreed blanket bog restoration strategy. It is a group of everyone with an interest in the uplands, who have come together, including the RSPB. I am slightly surprised that the RSPB has not



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mentioned any of the work that is going on, which is voluntary. Our members are absolutely at the forefront of fixing the peat. That does not just mean blocking up the grips; it means revegetating it where it is completely bare.

Further than that, we have pioneering and innovative methods of actually bringing back the wonderful bog moss species that are missing, which will slow the flow, filter the water for free and make sure the carbon loss is minimised.

All of these are public goods. I completely agree with Jeff Knott—public money for public goods—but these moorland managers are already doing this. They are the custodians of these very precious habitats. Let us not forget that we still have them. They are still there. They are natural; they are at the heart of our national parks. They are the jewel in the crown of our areas of outstanding natural beauty, and we must celebrate that. It is a tweaking and adjusting of the management techniques that is going on now and it is these custodians who are doing that work, because they have the knowledge and the expertise.

Q49 Ms Ritchie: Do you think that there is any need for a change to the laws on grouse shooting or are you happy with the status quo? You would have heard the evidence from the previous participants. They would have suggested that there was damage to the natural habitat, whether it was in terms of wildlife or in terms of the landscape quality. What is your comment on that, Ms Stokes?

Liam Stokes: The first thing to understand, and this came out in the first session, is that there are an awful lot of pieces of legislation that already apply to heather management. There are the 2007 burning regulations that would introduce fines if heather is burned inappropriately, leading to bare soils. Section 28 of the Wildlife Countryside Act says you cannot burn a SSSI without a licence from Natural England. Some 70% of upland SSSIs are grouse moor. There is a lot of legislation that is already governing what can go on. There is a fabulous line in the National Gamekeepers Organisation submission from a gamekeeper who works on a Natural England moor, who says you cannot sneeze on his moor without a licence from Natural England.

There has been a lot of use of this word “status quo”, but there is no status quo. Nobody is sitting here saying, “We know what we are doing. We are doing it the way we have done it for 50 years.” That is not what is happening. There is an awful lot of what Amanda has referred to as adaptive management where, as and when the research is showing us practice needs to change, practices have changed. As the research continues to develop, practice will continue to change, but I do defer to Amanda in terms of the examples of that change.

Q50 Ms Ritchie: It might be helpful for the Committee if you said a yes or no to the question: do you think that there is any need for a change to the laws on grouse shooting?



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Liam Stokes: No, not for changes to the law.

Q51 **Ms Ritchie:** You said that there is a body of law already existing.

Liam Stokes: There is a body of law existing and changes are occurring within that body of law.

Q52 **Ms Ritchie:** You feel that that existing body of law has protected the landscape according to adaptive management.

Liam Stokes: It allows adaptive management to occur within that framework. It is changing all the time, as it can do within that framework as it stands.

Amanda Anderson: I would agree the answer is no. We are highly regulated, as Liam says. Nine out of ten grouse moors are in a protected area. With protection comes regulation, so it is over and above the Wildlife and Countryside Act. It is over and above anything to do with managing animal welfare. This is protecting landscape at a landscape scale. On a moor, you cannot even bring in these wonderful bog plant species without consent from Natural England. We are working with them on every single moor to have a management plan that will see that restoration.

Q53 **Ms Ritchie:** Is the regulation that you referred to derived from the existing evidence of law, on a consolidated basis?

Amanda Anderson: The framework is there and there is no need to change that framework. We are very happy that fixing the peat is absolutely a priority.

Q54 **Ms Ritchie:** Has the framework a legislative basis?

Amanda Anderson: Yes.

Q55 **Chair:** Just one quick question before we move on: are you able to tell the Committee how many people have been prosecuted for burning illegally in recent years? Do you know that, by any chance?

Liam Stokes: I do not. Amanda, do you know?

Amanda Anderson: In my time working with the Moorland Association, I cannot recall someone being prosecuted for burning illegally. The prescriptions that go with burning, what you can burn, when you can burn, the size you can burn, the height the heather might be, how much moss might be beneath that heather, are incredibly detailed. In terms of the pragmatic thing to do on the ground, if a burn slips outside by a metre or two, completely by accident, while nobody would want that, would you really want to prosecute because of that incident?

Q56 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Ms Anderson and Mr Stokes, good afternoon. You have probably answered this question just a moment ago, but I was going to refer back to the discussion between Dr Avery and Mr Knott. Dr Avery wants an outright ban on driven grouse shooting. Mr Knott wants to see



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a licensing system introduced. Do you have any support at all for a licensing system, because you have just said that you do not want to see any changes in the law? Is there any merit to a licensing system?

Liam Stokes: I would not say so, no. This is a unique moment in which I agree with Mark Avery.

Jim Fitzpatrick: You might see a ban.

Liam Stokes: It is not that unique. Mark Avery has described the RSPB's licensing proposal as complex, unworkable and expensive. We would agree with that. The only worse idea would be a complete ban.

Amanda Anderson: I am really struggling to see what better outcomes licensing would bring, given the voluntary improvements that we are seeing already. We are harnessing the motivation of these land managers, who are investing £1 million a week in a million acres of our most precious upland areas, which carry all the designations we have talked about. Why would we, potentially with heavy-handed regulation that does not understand that system, want to take that away?

Q57 **Rishi Sunak:** Thank you both for being here. We have received evidence about the practice of heather burning. You would probably have listened to the evidence in the previous session and some of the claims that were made. I think the average person on the street is not familiar with moorland management; burning things sounds bad. Could you explain, if you were talking to someone who is not familiar with moorland and maybe has not visited one, the environmental benefits of burning heather? How would you explain to someone the benefits that it brings?

Liam Stokes: There has recently been a study, published last month in the *New Journal of Botany*, a 44-year-long longitudinal study, which considered low-intensity grazing as opposed to burning, in the maintenance of botanical communities in heather. The conclusion of that study was very clear: rotational burning is necessary to maintain the botanical communities that are currently protected by European directives. Heather moorland itself is ratified by the Rio Convention as being of international global significance, and burning that heather is a part of maintaining that globally significant ecosystem. In terms of what it looks like on the ground, I will defer to the Moorland Association.

Amanda Anderson: I quite understand that, if you set fire to something, it is destructive. Nobody is going to say otherwise. It is also regenerative. If you have heather that has got that high, grouse need the tips, the fresh shoots of the heather, full of nutrition. They need it at grouse head height, not three storeys up. By burning or mowing, you can regenerate, just like any gardener pruning the roses. You are going to regenerate, get fresh growth and get nutrition in there.

By having mowing or burning across the moor, you are creating a mosaic, a patchwork. The grouse like cover, so they will be tucked away into the longer stuff. The golden plover loves to nest right out in the



middle. It likes to see the predators all the way round to see what is coming. Curlew might tuck in on an edge, so there are all sorts of niches that are created. The RSPB could probably help us with mapping out where they thrive the best and how that is important.

Beyond that, by having different diversity and taking off the canopy, you are allowing other plants a chance. For grazing, that creates a grassy few years. That helps spread out grazing across the moor. We are losing shepherds and we are losing hefted flock, so the sheep are finding their own places to go, so you do not concentrate the grazing in one spot.

Beyond that, by managing the canopy of the heather, you are actually reducing the wildfire risk. The latest Committee on Climate Change report says that wildfire is a massive risk coming forward, with climate change. Now, this is the first time I have seen it in the report. They are recognised that this is a huge issue. Obviously protecting property is important, but we are talking about protecting the peat and these very, very precious habitats. A wildfire could destroy the lot in a few days.

Q58 Rishi Sunak: Thank you, that is very helpful. The last thing with burning is the link between burning and flooding. There seem to be mixed submissions on this topic. You would have heard some of the suggestions beforehand about what happened at Hebden Bridge. Have you conducted any research? Do you have a view on the link between the management technique of burning and flood risk?

Liam Stokes: We have not conducted specific research, but you are absolutely right to identify a clash in the views of scientists. There have been some really interesting mixed reports in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* over this year, disputing this exact topic, as to how far we can go in saying heather burning is causing harm in these various circumstances. An international group of scientists collaborated to say that, actually, people are going well beyond the parameters of the existing evidence in making some very lurid statements about heather burning.

It is a vital tool. We need to make sure these lurid statements do not stop us using this vital tool. As I said in the previous answer, we need continuous research to make sure that we are using this tool appropriately.

Amanda Anderson: There was mention of the EMBER report earlier from the University of Leeds, which has done an awful lot of work into this area. I can say, in that work, there is a catchment study on a place called Coverdale. In that area, they found that the run-off rate in heavy downpours was actually slower compared to heavily grazed neighbouring areas, in areas that were managed for HLS. They are receiving Government funding for agri-environment schemes. Those agri-environment schemes, overlaid, match up with the grouse moor management in those areas.



Run-off rate is all to do with the roughness of the surface. We have talked about getting the mosses back in; that will slow the flow of any system. We have talked about blocking up the drainage ditches. Clearly, that will slow the flow from the hills further down. It is all relative, so with this table on a tilt the water would rush off pretty quickly. We are trying, where we can, even though it is not a proven scientific fact, to use our noddles and say, actually, if we have a roughness there between the heather and the peat, the water will be slower. Whatever our management techniques, whatever our management practices, that is what our gamekeepers and land managers are now seeking to do.

- Q59 **Angela Smith:** Just on that, the EMBER project was actually a five-year project funded by the Natural Environment Research Council, so it was a very serious piece of work. I understand that the point you have just described, Amanda, is in there in the work, in the description of the project and the analysis of the outcomes. I just want to read one sentence from one of the abstracts: "More work is needed on fire effects on peatland river flow, but recent results suggest a complex response with smaller flow peaks for burned systems associated with most rainfall events, but enhanced peaks compared to unburned systems for the top quintile of rainfall events with the largest total rain." In other words, the University of Leeds found that, in extreme or heavy rainfall events, burned areas do produce greater peak flows.

My question is the same question to both you, Liam, and to you, Amanda. Is more work needed, because the EMBER project does demonstrate, and I think the GWCT work as well demonstrates, that there is no clean sheet here as far as burning is concerned? There is no green light on burning, to be honest, and more work is required.

Amanda Anderson: The first answer is that there is more work going on. Defra is funding a study, which is in year four of five, comparing the effects across a whole catchment of burning versus mowing versus doing nothing. This is not just on one of our member's moors; this is replicated across three very different moors. Somebody said earlier that no moor is the same, so they are very different catchments. Clearly, anything to do with water and burning depends on what comes in and what then comes out the other end. This study so far, even though all the catchments are very different, is measuring everything that can move and does not move on a moor—carbon fluxes and everything else.

- Q60 **Angela Smith:** More work is needed, is it not? That is what you are saying.

Amanda Anderson: Work is going on. Natural England and Defra would both love to see that as a 10-year study, and they are calling out for more money now. Again, rotation of burning was mentioned. It is a very tiny snapshot in time, but it looks like, initially, mowing might have a better impact for carbon.

Angela Smith: What about cutting?



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Amanda Anderson: I said mowing; that is the same thing. Over time, it looks like burning areas may catch up, in terms of soaking up carbon.

Liam Stokes: I would answer in one word. Yes, more work is needed and management will adapt to follow it, as the research develops.

- Q61 **Angela Smith:** Amanda, just on something you said earlier, the work that private landowners are doing on moorland restoration is to be welcomed, of course. The money that they are putting into it is to be welcomed, but is it not the case that that work is a partnership, which involves significant sums of European money and also the involvement of bodies like the National Trust, Yorkshire Water and United Utilities? It is not entirely accurate to say that it is just the private landowners who are doing that work. Can we just be accurate for the record?

Amanda Anderson: I absolutely agree with you. There is an amazing amount of work and expertise. We are world-leading in this country, in terms of peatland restoration. There is the work that the RSPB has done on its own land. It is definitely a partnership. What I was referring to is where our custodians are going further. The revegetation of bare peat is definitely funded.

Angela Smith: It is also funded by national parks and Europe, and particularly by Moors for the Future, in my area. It is absolutely co-funded and driven by the national parks.

Amanda Anderson: It is absolutely key. With their latest tranche of money, to mention Moors for the Future in the Peak District, we are working incredibly closely together on guidance for the land managers and Natural England on the way forward and how we can keep the tools and the toolkit to restore the peat as quickly as we can. That does not mean to say that burning is not good. Actually, we have talked about the canopy and that canopy of heather will prevent mosses coming back in. We need to get the canopy off. Some places you will be able to mow; other places you will not. Burning needs to stay in that toolkit.

- Q62 **Angela Smith:** We will leave the burning to one side for the moment. Just as a final point, you mentioned the protections that some of the moorlands have. My grass moors are completely protected. It is a SSSI, because it is national park as well of course, so it has the heaviest protection, but I have no hen harriers. I have no peregrine falcons. The curlew population is going down and it is one of the most degraded moorland environments in Europe. I understand that part of the issue has been acid rain over a 200-year period, the draining and the gripping in the 1960s, but nevertheless, even now, I have one of the most degraded environments in Europe and no birds of prey. The peregrine falcons are actually nesting in Sheffield city centre, but they do not nest in their natural environment, so what is going wrong? Liam, can you explain it?

Liam Stokes: I will start with that. To take the raptor issue, as you have alluded to and as we have heard in the previous session, raptor



populations have boomed over varying timescales, depending on which species we are looking at. There is an issue on grouse moors. Nobody is denying that. The question becomes: how do we deal with that issue? If we want to see a positive outcome, what is the answer? Again, this question of status quo that has been repeatedly mentioned earlier is not accurate. This is going to be solved through collaboration. It is not going to be solved through a top-down approach.

We have heard it said earlier that the killing of raptors must stop. I totally agree with that. We need to look at how we bring that about, in a way that some people may find distasteful, but we are going to talk about—things like brood management. We are going to come on to that sort of discussion, I would imagine, later on in this session. If it can deliver real tangible results, then that is what we need to be doing. We have not really talked much about the hen harrier joint action plan yet this afternoon. It has only been in place since—how long ago?

Amanda Anderson: January.

Liam Stokes: We have not even been through one breeding season yet. We cannot begin to talk about whether this has been successful. We have not gone into the brood management. We have not started any of these adaptive management approaches to be able to see whether they have been successful. We are not sitting in front of you saying there is no problem. We are saying that we need to come up with a solution that is actually going to deliver results for these raptor populations.

Chair: Can I ask, as time is going on, that we try to keep questions and answers concise, please?

Q63 **Simon Hart:** Of course. By my estimation, alternative uses for grouse moors, in the event of there being no driven grouse shooting, would be forestry, wind generation, tourism, agriculture in the form of sheep and possibly doing nothing, the wilderness approach. I may have missed something; if I have, you will put me right. Dealing really with the ban and the views expressed in the previous session, what assessment have you made and what do you think would be the impact on wildlife on those moors if these alternatives came to be?

Liam Stokes: You have stated a couple of different examples. I would agree with you entirely that those are, essentially, the options. There are papers that exist showing what happens when grouse shooting stops. It tends to become either commercial forestry or intensive sheep farming, for the most part. Those are the two options.

In terms of intensive sheep farming, Scottish Natural Heritage papers would suggest that what you get is biodiversity-poor grassland. You get a loss of any mountain hare population you may once have had. It is certainly no better for hen harriers. In fact, a genuinely neutral organisation on this subject, the British Trust for Ornithology, is very clear that, as and when you lose a grouse moor, what you actually lose is



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habitat, food and protection from predators for hen harriers. The localised impact on biodiversity is going to be dreadful.

Forestry is a little bit different, but you are going to see, in areas where we are talking about deep peat and that sort of thing, habitat fragmentation. You are going to see a negative impact on the hydrology of those internationally important areas of blanket bog.

Q64 **Simon Hart:** Is that a view shared by the Moorland Association?

Amanda Anderson: I think I would probably go further in saying that forestry, non-native Sitka spruce for instance, on deep peat, is completely accepted by everybody, the Forestry Commission included, as not an alternative, not when that peat is storing up the carbon and those trees will not help that store at all. I do not think that is an option for these areas.

Intensive sheep grazing may well become something that increases again. We have spent a lot of time with government policy reversing overgrazing but, with Brexit and upland farmers really struggling to make ends meet, they may well just think, "Actually, I don't want to take any Government handouts. I'll farm sheep." We have heard what that can do in terms of compaction, a very short sward, loss of biodiversity and faster runoff for flooding, so I do not think it is an option that we would like to see.

I think the most likely option, to be honest, is abandonment. With that would come that wildfire risk. We would have shrub encroachment. We would have bracken encroachment. Moorland managers spend a lot of their private money keeping bracken off the moors. I am sure Angela would agree that, for anybody trying to walk through bracken that is six foot high and full of ticks that are carrying diseases, which have quadrupled Lyme disease in this country or something, it is a frightening prospect.

Q65 **Simon Hart:** Apart from ticks, who are the winners in this situation?

Amanda Anderson: The people who produce Frontline, which gets rid of the ticks on your dogs.

Q66 **Simon Hart:** Being less flippant, are there any species of wildlife, animal or avian, which would benefit from this?

Amanda Anderson: You would see a shift. You have an open environment at the moment. You would see a shift from the curlew, lapwing and golden plover to species that prefer a woody, shrubby area. At this point, I must mention the black grouse. They are 96% correlated with the edges of red grouse moors, because of the predator management, the foxes, crows, rats, weasels, stouts that our gamekeepers are managing, especially off the moorland fringe for the black grouse, and planting native trees where it is appropriate. They are very much going to be losers from this as well.



Q67 Chris Davies: Those in favour of a ban on grouse shooting argue that it is associated with the illegal persecution of raptors, including the hen harrier. How would you respond to those allegations?

Liam Stokes: I would repeat what I said earlier. We are not saying that there has not been a historical problem with the persecution of hen harriers. We would say that we need a workable solution and not what may be deemed gestures, essentially. We have the hen harrier joint action plan. We need to give it time to work. We need to talk about the possibilities of brood management. We need to talk about the benefits that that might have for the hen harrier.

To start saying that we need to look at alternatives to that when it has had nine months is, frankly, ludicrous, given it took six years to bring all the organisations around the table to actually agree that this was the way forward. This is where these questions of licensing are quite extraordinary. This action plan has conservationists, Government, gamekeepers and landowners united behind it. Those are the people who are going to deliver these results on the ground. Licensing has the support of nobody but the RSPB. We need to talk about real solutions.

Amanda Anderson: If I may, it is a Defra subgroup that is looking at different actions within the hen harrier plan. I sit on one of those that looks at brood management. We are at this moment scoping that brood management trial. We very much hope that the funding, the licensing and the logistics are in place for the next breeding season, but it has not started. To say that it has failed before you have sat the A-level exam seems to be a little premature.

Q68 Chris Davies: The RSPB is the only organisation that has withdrawn from that group, from what I understand. Is the door still open for them to come back? If so, would you encourage them to come back?

Amanda Anderson: The RSPB was invited on to both the brood management working group—it declined—and also on to the lowland reintroduction group. We hear lots about how many pairs of hen harriers could breed in England. It is a cross-England recovery plan. They used to be in every county. They favour grouse moors now, because that is where there is habitat; that is where there is food. They actually do better when they nest on grouse moors. They have more chicks because of that protection and because of that wonderful food larder that we have heard about—the curlew, the lapwing, the golden plover and the grouse—for them to feed from.

The door is always open, but I would say that we are getting on very well in our working group. We have conservationists there. We have experts there. We have the world's leading hen harrier experts with us and we are determined to make a success of this trial.

Q69 Chris Davies: Liam, I have a final question. A lot has been said today about the hen harrier action plan. Can you just confirm again, for the



record, which organisations are still involved in this Defra committee?

Liam Stokes: That is a question for Amanda, whose organisation is a member.

Amanda Anderson: The hen harrier plan is a six-point plan, and each bit has people who are part of it. We have had four of those actions ongoing for some time, so things like tagging of the birds, nest watch, winter roof site protection, diversionary feeding, which is putting out food for the harriers so it takes away from impacting on various populations; these things have been going on. We are working with the national Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group, which I also sit on. These things are ongoing and I am sure the RSPB would say that it is still part of those four ongoing things. We are saying that this has needed a new approach, a new take, new ideas, with new people taking them forward and that is what we are doing.

Within our working group, it is GWCT, which you have heard about. It is Steve Redpath, from the university. He works in wildlife conflict areas. It is the Hawk and Owl Trust. It is Natural England chairing the group.

Q70 **Catherine McKinnell:** Concerns have been expressed to me by constituents that volunteers have worked very hard to get the red kite reintroduced to the north-east and into the Lower Derwent Valley; then, as they move off up into Northumberland, they disappear. A lot of that is believed to be them potentially being killed by gamekeepers. You seem to acknowledge that that may be happening. Do you have a time limit put upon this trial? One alternative is also that, in Scotland, landowners have to prove to the Scottish courts that they have taken every step possible to prevent their employees from committing these wildlife crimes. The RSPB agrees that that is a successful approach. Do you agree with that? What do you have to say in response?

Liam Stokes: We have to have the conversation about red kites in context. Over the past 20 years, we have gone from 160 pairs of red kites to 1,600 pairs of red kites. It is a fantastic success story, but that is not to say that we sit on our laurels, at this point. Obviously the hen harrier joint action plan is not going to address red kite persecution, if and when it occurs. These infrequent occasions of illegal killing need to be dealt with through similar collaborative responses. We have heard about the RPPDG, the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group, which brings together stakeholders to try to catch perpetrators when this sort of thing happens.

With regards to vicarious liability, this is a serious issue. We need to consider everything that is on the table. As it stands, we agree with the Law Commission, which looked at this question in 2013 and essentially came to the conclusion that vicarious liability in England would be an unjust extension of the principle of liability to rural business owners. In Scotland, so far there have been two prosecutions under vicarious liability and one of those was a game farmer. That is not what this is supposed



to be doing. I am not convinced that it is part of the solution. I think it might be a distraction. What we need is better enforcement of what we have on the ground. We need more collaborative work through organisations like the RPPDG.

Amanda Anderson: I was just going to say that it is in no one's interest to have an incident of human interference with birds of prey, but I also have in my head a picture, up on the moors, probably not in your constituency but in Yorkshire, of two kites hunting up and down a heathery bank, which are then mobbed by two merlins, who are not very happy with the kites looking for their chicks, and a kestrel zooming in from the left-hand side. These birds are there on these moors. I see them from my kitchen window.

In terms of looking at Scotland and what we can learn from that, there is due diligence. Each estate must be responsible for everything that happens on that estate. We are using the processes that they have put in place to ensure that our membership is fully aware of all the things that they can be doing to tighten up contracts of employment, to look at training and supervision, and to make sure that there is absolutely no room for someone to let us down and that everybody is doing the right thing.

Q71 **Steve Double:** What role does grouse shooting play in the rural economy? I would also be interested to hear how many jobs you think are supported by grouse shooting, across the country.

Liam Stokes: The best industry statistics we have are that between 2,500 and 4,000 full-time jobs are supported by grouse shooting across England, Scotland and Wales. Those are full-time equivalents, so that is taking into account large quantities of seasonal work. That in itself is not a problem. We have to remember that shooting tends to take place at times of the year when other forms of rural income, such as tourism, are maybe not to be found. They are bringing important investment and jobs into these areas, at times when traditional tourism is drying up.

It is really important that we touch on this. The Rio Convention defines sustainability for us. It says that we have to talk about economics; we have to talk about social questions. Back in August, 300 gamekeepers were piped through the streets of Edzell in Angus, surrounded by their communities and families, marching in solidarity, because these were essentially rural workers who feel their livelihoods are being threatened by precisely the petition we are here to discuss today.

Ahead of that march, the moorland groups in Scotland had calculated that roughly £7 million was going to be paid, in Scotland specifically, in wages, directly as a result of grouse shooting. They estimated, and these are always going to be estimates, a value of about £32 million specifically for the Scottish economy. There is not really a great deal of value in rolling that up with similar estimates that have been made in England, because they have been come to in very different ways, but we are



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talking about a significant investment in the rural community and a significant investment in communities and in society, which would be irreplaceable were it to disappear.

Amanda Anderson: If I could add to that and take you to a place in Littendale, which is the most remote tiny place—it is the wiggliest little single-track road, with no white lines in sight—suddenly you come across a tiny hamlet. The landowner there has bought the moor above it and converted a barn for his gamekeeper to live in, because there was nowhere else for him to live. That has a tie to the person living there to now manage the moor.

He has then brought his girlfriend and they have married. He has had a child. It is the first child born to that valley for 13 years. The local school, which is under pressure of closure, is rubbing its hands. They are pregnant again. This is great. We are going to extend the cottage. His wife works in the local pub that the local community looked to that landowner to save. This is the middle of nowhere. Nobody will find this pub unless they are lost. He has taken it on. He can see for himself that the people who are going to come and beat on his moor on a shoot day, and there are up to about 50 people involved, are going to take the £50 he gives them and spend it behind his bar. This is great.

It goes on. He also ensures that the grouse that are shot on that moor come down to the pub for free, so that the publican can then increase his footfall to the pub, so people can come and taste grouse and understand the whole circle. It is not just about how many jobs. It is the ripple effect from the moor, down to those valleys to these really stricken, very remote but local places

Steve Double: My next question was going to be about whether the earnings from shoots are shared throughout the community, which you have described very well. I do not know if Liam wants to add anything further to that.

Liam Stokes: I am not sure I can add anything to that description.

Q72 **Steve Double:** Do you believe that these rural communities that host grouse shooting have any other forms of income or are they predominantly reliant on this?

Amanda Anderson: There is a mixture across our membership. The primary use of moorland is sheep grazing. Sometimes our members will have that sheep grazing in hand, as they say; it is their flock. Quite often the rights are owned by somebody else or they might have a tenant grazier but, as I have mentioned before, upland farming is really hard. The average profit after subsidy is about £5,000. It is a tough life, so I would not say it is an alternative income. There are other members that might have other enterprises and more low-ground tourism. They will use those sources to fund their grouse moor management.



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Liam Stokes: We are not saying that these communities are there purely because of grouse shooting. We are saying that you cannot replace this amount of income. To say that you can do away with it and hope that something is going to come in to replace it, and suddenly people are going to turn up and pay similar sums to participate in ecotourism, is just a colossal gamble with people's lives, livelihoods and communities.

Q73 **Oliver Dowden:** I think we have probably covered off most of this in previous questions, particularly Mr Hart's questions. We have talked quite a bit about alternative uses for the land. Have these alternative uses been successful elsewhere and do you have any analysis of the relative economic benefit from alternative uses? Some things have been discussed in addition to what we discussed earlier, such as commercial wind farms. I know we have discussed commercial forestry as well.

Liam Stokes: I do not have anything on the economic impact. What we have is an awful lot on the biological and the environmental impact of these different land uses. We can fairly talk about the potential social impact. Amanda has already mentioned these 50 people who participate in any given grouse shoot. That is really very, very significant. It may not sound significant to us but, in a remote rural community, this is something that brings the community together. It combats rural isolation. It is a huge part of what binds these communities.

The honest answer is that we just do not know what would happen if we did away with grouse shooting. If we covered the uplands with wind turbines, if we covered them with sheep, if we covered them with Sitka spruce, we do not know what the economic result would be. We cannot sit here and say, "This is definitely what would happen." We can say that these are definitely the benefits of grouse moorland management, and you would be doing away with them and hoping something better would come in its place.

Q74 **Oliver Dowden:** Presumably there are some areas of upland that are used for these alternative uses. Do you have any analysis of the employment of those compared to grouse moorland? I do not know whether you would like to add anything, Amanda.

Amanda Anderson: I do not have specific figures, but I know that farming communities are losing their young, rather than gaining their young. The shepherds are being lost. You are down to one man managing his sheep farm. If you add on to that same patch of land four or five gamekeepers and their families, you can very quickly see how we are improving the lot for the upland economy.

If I may make a point, everything is relative. Angela referred to the moors near her and, again, I have a beautiful picture in my head of exactly where you mean. I find it heart-breaking that conservation is so negative in saying it is the most degraded habitat in Europe. If we covered it in wind farms, over-grazed it with sheep or turned it into a



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forestry block, then I really would start to agree and say that that is not the right thing to do with these areas.

Angela Smith: That is not what I said, Amanda. I did not say that. I said the conservationists are doing a fantastic job from Moors for the Future, but they are dealing with the most degraded environment in Europe. That is what I said, for the record.

Q75 **Chair:** That was for the sake of accuracy.

Amanda Anderson: My point is that it would get an awful lot poorer without these custodians looking after that land, which is why we still have it.

Q76 **Oliver Dowden:** Specifically, further to your answer, your contention is that the employment opportunities of grouse moorland are better, relative to the other potential uses.

Amanda Anderson: I would say certainly, because you need people there for grouse moor management. You need people in the hills to manage the land. I do not think you need very many people to manage trees, and there are fewer and fewer people managing sheep.

Q77 **Oliver Dowden:** What about the initial cost, were you to switch from grouse moorland to these other uses? Presumably there would be an initial cost to it. Do you have any sense of that initial cost?

Amanda Anderson: I am not sure about cost. I would go back to the figure of £1 million privately invested every week in wildlife management, which would be lost. It is more a question of how we would replace that private investment on these SSSI sites, which are designated for their birdlife and their special habitat, to ensure that those sites meet their conservation targets.

Q78 **Oliver Dowden:** Dr Avery talked quite a bit about tourism. It may have been the RSPB as well. Is tourism viable as an alternative?

Liam Stokes: There is no doubt that ecotourism is important. We have an SNH report that says it is worth about £1.4 billion to Scotland. The point is that that £1.4 billion is already being spent in Scotland. It is happening because people are visiting these beautiful uplands as they are, with the contribution of grouse moorland management as part of the ecosystem that they are going to visit. To speculate, if you were to do away with these figures and say we have this £52.5 million invested in conservation in England and £32 million invested in the economy in Scotland, are we confident that these figures are going to be replaced by ecotourism if we do away with grouse shooting? It seems very unlikely.

There are statistics kicking around. There is a study showing that one in three visitors to the Peak District spends money, which means that two in three do not. Simon Lester up at Langholm has commented that, when we had lots of hen harriers, they could be viewed from the road. Plenty of people came to see them, but they came along in their cars. They



viewed them from the roadside, through their binoculars, and they drove off again.

Amanda Anderson: They did not pay out £50.

Liam Stokes: They did not pay that £50, no, indeed. I do not see where this proposed income is supposed to come from. Please do not misunderstand me: ecotourism is fantastic. What is happening at Mull is brilliant, but it is just such a gamble with people's lives and livelihoods to say it is going to increase exponentially if we do away with all this money being brought in by grouse shooting.

- Q79 **Simon Hart:** This is just a continuation point. The witnesses in the last session could not really explain how life would look in the situation where a total ban had been imposed. There was no future estimation of what that impact would be. You have alluded to the fact that it is very difficult to see what the economic impact would be of the alternative forms of land use, but do both of you accept that, in order to justify a change in the legislation in which livelihoods are potentially put at risk, the onus lies on those advocating a total ban to come up with those answers? The Government certainly have to weigh the evidence on both sides, before they make any moves, be that licensing or abolition.

Liam Stokes: Yes, 100%, absolutely.

Amanda Anderson: Yes.

- Q80 **Simon Hart:** Very quickly, it was suggested to us as well that the easy answer to all of this is to potentially take the intensity out of grouse shooting and go back to a walked-up grouse shooting model, without any supporting economic or ecological evidence of what that might entail, I have to say. Is there a reason why you think that might or might not be a solution to this problem?

Liam Stokes: There are two halves to the answer there. There was an attempt to move from driven grouse shooting to this less intense version of shooting—I hesitate to use the word “intensity” and Amanda is going to explain why shortly—which is walked-up, in the Berwyn Hills in Wales. That is where we saw this complete cessation of gamekeeping, because it was just not sustainable. You cannot pay for all this good work we have talked about off the back of walked-up grouse shooting. That is why we saw this 50% decline in hen harriers. This is why we saw a localised extinction of lapwings. There have been 90% crashes in curlew numbers. That is why that happened; it was because we tried to move from driven to walked-up and it just collapsed.

Amanda Anderson: As soon as you lose the gamekeepers, you lose all the benefits that you see. Driven grouse shooting depends, firstly, on the natural breeding ability of a hen grouse to produce up to 12 eggs and hatch those young. They are fantastic parents—a wild bird in its own natural habitat. That is what is harnessed by the gamekeepers. For the bird to be in good nick to lay all those eggs, you need good habitat and



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good food. Managing the stoats, the rats, the crows and the weasels that will predate those chicks and those eggs, in fact, is the next thing. Every wild animal and every domestic animal is prone to disease, so a couple of those are also managed.

That all takes a lot of money. A gamekeeper gets his salary, his vehicle and his home, where he brings up his family. Before you start, you are looking at a sum of £50,000. The motivation for that is driven grouse shooting. The man paying the bills wants to shoot driven grouse. Shooting a grouse that is further away than that wall across very difficult terrain is not for everybody. It is not even possible for everybody and it certainly would not motivate the sort of money that we are seeing spent on conservation management.

- Q81 **Angela Smith:** Liam, I know that you have very high professional standards and that the gamekeeping profession has developed very high levels of training, with apprenticeships and so on. Do you accept, though, that, if an estate moves from what is seen as very good gamekeeping to very bad gamekeeping—in other words, you get in someone with very poor standards and poor levels of ethics—it can have an equally devastating impact?

Liam Stokes: That comes back to what Amanda was describing earlier about trying to making sure, through our terms of employment, that that does not happen. I certainly would not disagree that, where an excellent gamekeeper can have a fantastic impact on the environment, a poor gamekeeper can have a negative impact on the environment. It is about using those terms of employment to try to control for that.

- Q82 **Angela Smith:** Can I just ask one more question? If public money is given to landowners to maintain grouse shooting estates for agri-environmental reasons, at the end of the day, it is public money being spent on privately owned estates. I do not have a problem with that at all, but I found out recently, through a retrospective planning application in my constituency, that I have a landowner who I did not know about. I thought I knew the landowners in my area and I have suddenly found this new landowner. Would it not be helpful if we had more transparency in terms of land ownership of grouse moors? That would actually help move on the debate, if we knew a little bit more about who we are dealing with.

Liam Stokes: It is an interesting thought and it is honestly not one I have considered. I do not know if that is something you can comment on, Amanda.

Amanda Anderson: I am not sure why you do not know who is there or why that would not be transparent.

Angela Smith: They keep themselves very obscure. Shall I put it that way?

Amanda Anderson: If you would like to meet anyone, let us set it up.



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Angela Smith: That is not an answer to the question.

Amanda Anderson: I am afraid I cannot answer the question, because I do not understand why it would not be transparent as it is.

Q83 **Angela Smith:** Why do you not just agree that, given landowners get public money to maintain their estates—I do not have a problem with that, by the way—it would be helpful for us to know who they are? We know who the farmers are, so why should we not know who the landowners are?

Amanda Anderson: Again, I cannot answer the question, because I am not entirely sure why you cannot find out at the moment.

Angela Smith: Because you cannot.

Liam Stokes: The simple answer is that it is something to consider, at some stage.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence, Liam and Amanda. It has been a very interesting session. As normal, if there is anything else you want to say to us that you have not had the opportunity to say, please do so in writing. We have gone on a lot longer than we originally intended, but we have all found it extremely interesting, if contradictory at times, from both panels. You have all given us a lot to think about before the debate on the 31st, so thank you very much indeed.