

Written evidence submitted by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (MH0013)

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry into rural mental health.

January 2022

INTRODUCTION

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) is the largest shooting organisation in the UK with over 150,000 members.

Our mission is to promote and protect sporting shooting and advocate its conservation role throughout the UK.

Our role is to provide an effective and unified voice for sustainable shooting sports; to benefit the community by providing education, promoting scientific research, and advocating best practice in firearms licensing, habitat conservation, and wildlife and game management; and to promote the benefits of game as food.

Shooting contributes £2 billion a year to the UK economy and supports the equivalent of 74,000 full-time jobs.

RURAL MENTAL HEALTH INQUIRY

Gamekeepers and mental health

In 2020, Scottish Government commissioned research into the socioeconomic and biodiversity impacts of driven grouse moors and the employment rights of gamekeepers found that as many as 64% of Scottish gamekeepers experience threatening behaviour or abuse from members of the public at least once every year.

The study surveyed 152 gamekeepers which constitutes between 10-13% of the Scottish gamekeeping population. Among the other findings is a suggestion that up to 79% of gamekeepers feel less optimistic about their future, which is reportedly driven by targeted anti-shooting campaigns, a lack of government support and the negative portrayal of shooting in the public domain.

For a copy of the report visit:

www.gov.scot/publications/summary-report-socioeconomic-biodiversity-impacts-driven-grouse-moors-employment-rights-gamekeepers/

In 2020, BASC ran a gamekeeper survey in partnership with the Countryside Alliance, Country Land & Business Association, Game Farmers Association, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, and the National Gamekeeper's Organisation.

The gamekeeper survey received over 1,000 responses and 64% of gamekeepers reported having experienced abuse and/or threats because of their occupation. In some cases this had led to mental health deterioration and relationship breakdowns.

For a copy of the report visit:

www.basc.org.uk/gamekeeper-survey-2020

The increase in abuse and threats towards gamekeepers is believed to be related to local and online campaigns by those with ideological views against shooting. Gamekeepers report feelings of paranoia, shock, deflation, stress and demoralisation and being overwhelmed as impacts of being targeted directly and indirectly.

BASC Scotland is calling for the creation of a Gamekeeping Taskforce in the Scottish Parliament, amid concerns the profession is being increasingly marginalised and mental health and wellbeing will be a key focus within the taskforce.

The Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust provides a helpline that gamekeepers can call for advice on a range of topics including mental health.

Mental health benefits of participating in shooting activities

BASC's 2016 report titled 'The personal value of shooting: the social, physical and personal wellbeing contribution of shooting in the UK' summarised results from a survey that investigated the wellbeing benefits people received from taking part in shooting, beating, picking up, and habitat management. The report included the following key findings:

Shooting makes an important contribution to health and wellbeing among people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

Shooting can help to get more adults active through sport and physical activity, reduce social isolation and promote personal wellbeing whilst encouraging people to engage with the natural environment.

Allowing for variations according to discipline, shooting and its associated activities are moderate to high intensity physical activities.

Ninety-five per cent of respondents said shooting was important to their personal wellbeing whilst eighty-four per cent said shooting was important for their physical wellbeing.

A further eighty-eight per cent responded by saying shooting provides them with moderate to high intensity exercise and seventy-one per cent stated that without shooting their levels of physical activity would suffer.

For a copy of the report visit:

www.basc.org.uk/the-personal-value-of-shooting

A 2021 research paper titled 'Examining the role of driven-game shooting as a psycho-social resource for older adults in rural areas: a mixed-methods study', published in the journal 'Ageing & Society', concluded that participation in shooting and shooting-related activities, such as beating and picking-up, resulted in significantly better mental wellbeing than the national average.

Items that scored high included reduced loneliness, strong identity a sense of purpose, social support networks, physical exercise, spending time in nature and a strong rural and/or cultural heritage.

The findings were linked to age, with older generations benefiting more from the physical and social side of shooting. The authors also concluded that shooting aided the wider society, as those with a better physical condition and mental wellbeing would be less of a burden on the public health service.

For a copy of the paper visit:

www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ageing-and-society/article/abs/examining-the-role-of-drivengame-shooting-as-a-psychosocial-resource-for-older-adults-in-rural-areas-a-mixedmethods-study/25B098E1282DD64BFEAFA037DC634DE2

These research findings were derived from a PhD Thesis undertaken at the Institute for Social Innovation and Impact at the University of Northampton titled 'Understanding the social impact of participation in driven game shooting in the UK'.

For a copy of the PhD thesis visit:

www.researchgate.net/publication/344191124_Executive_Summary_of_a_PhD_Thesis_'Understanding_the_social_impact_of_participation_in_Driven_Game_Shooting_in_the_UK

Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust is trialing a scheme where GPs, nurses and other health care professionals can prescribe angling instead of antidepressants for some mental health conditions.

The NHS-prescribed angling opportunities are delivered by Tackling Minds, an organisation founded in 2020 to help people struggling with a range of issues to participate in angling and engage with the local environment.

BASC recommendations

Gamekeepers provide key services as rural workers and the EFRA committee should include gamekeeping as an occupation covered by its recommendations on how the government can improve mental health provisions and service in rural communities.

Participation in shooting provides physical and mental health benefits and the EFRA committee should recognise and reference this in its report and recommend that the government introduces schemes and funding that encourage more people to take up shooting in rural areas.