

Written Evidence from Wearable Estates Ltd (GRO0191)

Weardale Estates Ltd own and manage two driven grouse moors in the North Pennines.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Grouse shooting is a legal activity which is adequately regulated and undertaken both responsibly and sustainably. It benefits both wildlife and the environment. It is a significant employer in remote parts of the uplands and is a vital contributor to the local economy.
- 1.2 It is difficult to identify an alternative industry that could replace the significant contribution driven grouse shooting makes to the uplands.

2. Should the law on grouse shooting be changed? If so, how?

- 2.1 The law on grouse shooting should not be changed.
- 2.2 Grouse shooting is a legal activity under the **Game Act 1831**. It is carried out responsibly and sustainably by the vast majority of those who enjoy it and benefit from it.
- 2.3 **The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981** protects wild birds, including grouse and their eggs. Predatory birds may only be taken or killed under licence from the Secretary of State. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) [many of which include grouse moors] were also set up under this Act within which any exploitation of wildlife, including shooting and pest and predator management are subject to consent by Natural England. Consent is also required within SSSIs and SPAs for any operation that might damage the flora, fauna or habitat within the designated area.
- 2.4 Most driven grouse moors are self-regulated through compliance with the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) Code of Good Shooting Practice. The grouse shooting industry is also supported by many other reputable organisations including The Countryside Alliance, The Moorland Association, The National Gamekeepers Organisation, The Country Land and Business Association, The Heather Trust, The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust to name but a few.
- 2.5 **The Firearms Act 1968** requires those who participate in driven grouse shooting to hold shotgun certificates which are issued by the Police so the very highest legislative standards are already in place.

3. What effect does grouse shooting have on wildlife and the environment?

- 3.1 Grouse shooting has a positive effect on both wildlife and the environment.
- 3.2 There is both anecdotal and scientific evidence to support the positive impact grouse shooting has on wildlife through legal control of predators such as foxes, stoats, weasels, carrions crows and other predators by game keepers. The Upland Predation Experiment concluded that where moors are managed by gamekeepers, ground nesting birds such as curlew and lapwing are 3.5 times more likely to raise a chick to fledging than unmanaged moors. A survey of upland breeding birds in parts of England and Scotland also found that densities of golden plover, curlew, redshank and lapwing were up to five times greater on

managed grouse moors compared to unmanaged moors. The black grouse population has declined 50% nationally with 96% of the male black grouse in the north of England being found adjacent to moorland managed for grouse shooting.

3.3 By comparison, the Berwyn Special Protection Area supports the most extensive tract of blanket bog and upland heath in Wales. It was designated in 1998 as an SPA for its internationally significant numbers of hen harriers, merlin, peregrine and red kite whilst supporting significant proportions of Welsh populations of upland breeding waders.

3.4 Following the Second World War there has been a decline in grouse moor management in the Berwyn SPA and in the late 1990's driven grouse shooting ceased altogether. The GWCT undertook a study in the changes in upland bird numbers and distribution in this area between 1983 and 2012. The main findings are:

- Between 1983-5 and 2002, lapwing numbers were lost from the Berwyn survey areas, golden plover declined from ten birds to one and curlew declined by 79%
- Carrion crow numbers increased six-fold and ravens four-fold, with the number of occupied 1-km² grid squares doubling and trebling respectively
- Buzzard numbers increased two-fold and the number of occupied grid squares increased four-fold. Peregrines increased seven fold in abundance whilst hen harriers declined by half
- Ring ouzel declined by 78% and tree pipit by 50% although the numbers of meadow pipits, whinchat and stonechat did increase
- Red grouse numbers decreased by 54% between the upland breeding bird surveys and black grouse numbers decreased by 78%.

3.5 The decline in these bird species particularly the upland wading birds and the hen harrier coincided with the decline of grouse moor management.

3.6 Grouse shooting also has a positive impact on the environment.

3.7 Moorland managed for grouse shooting covers just one fifth of the uplands in England and Wales and yet more the 70% of England's upland Sites of Special Scientific Interest are managed grouse moors. Over 40% of these are designated as Special Protection Areas for rare birds and Special Areas of Conservation for rare vegetation under European wildlife directives. This is no coincidence. In the last 30 years grouse moor owners in England have been responsible for the regeneration and recovery of over 217,000 acres of heather – this must be good for the environment and good for those species that rely upon it.

3.8 Studies show that grouse moor management is a carbon positive land use – and the controlled, rotational burning of heather helps reduce both the risk of damaging wildfires and carbon loss by up to 34%. In 2003 a wildfire severely damaged 1,800 acres of Bleaklow Moor in the Peak District. The cost of restoring the damaged acres of moor was £1.235M. If the costs for suppression (£550,000) and to the local economy (£500,000) are added the total cost of the fire came to £2.5M (Buckler, Moors for the Future Partnership 2010). **The Heather and Grass Burning (England) Regulations 2007** which was developed in association with key stakeholders under the last Labour Government acknowledges that *'Fire have been*

used by land managers for many thousands of years. When used with skill and understanding, it can benefit agriculture, game birds and wildlife’.

- 3.9 Approximately 70% of the UK’s drinking water comes from the uplands. The drainage of moors was widespread in the 1960’s and 70’s with successive governments offering farmers grants to drain their land. Subsequent research showed these drains continued to erode over time and the only way to reduce sediment run off was to block them. Blocking them restored the natural drainage patterns, reduced run off, reduced the knock on effect of hydrological change downstream and encouraged revegetation of bare peat. Grouse moor owners and managers have, with government and other organisations, worked on numerous projects which include the revegetation of bare peat, blocking moorland drains to raise water tables to encourage the growth of sphagnum moss to slow down the flow of surface water and filter discolouration. In the North Pennines alone, 2,700 miles of drainage ditches have been blocked.
- 3.10 The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in partnership with Weardale Estates Ltd are restoring bare peat at high altitude.
- 3.11 On the Weardale Estate some 650 acres of former forestry has been restored to heather through private investment over the past 30 years – the work resulted in the coveted gold Purdey award for Game and Conservation in 2012.
- 3.12 The North Pennines AONB Peatland Programme was awarded the Climate Change Award at the Durham Environment Awards in 2015.
- 3.13 These are all examples of the positive impact grouse shooting has on the environment.

4. What role does grouse shooting play in rural life, especially the rural economy?

- 4.1 Grouse shooting is extremely important in rural life and the contribution it makes to the fragile rural economy in the uplands is very significant.
- 4.2 Somewhere between 50 and 60 people can be employed on each and every shoot day including beaters, pickers up, loaders, keepers, drivers and domestic staff. According to the most recent PACEC report, grouse moor owners in England spend £52.5M every year on moorland management, 90% of which is privately funded and the majority of which directly benefits the rural economy. Businesses associated with grouse shooting benefit to the tune of £15.2M each year including game dealers, equipment suppliers, accommodation providers, catering establishments, transport providers – many of whom are often based in remote rural locations providing important employment. 190 grouse moors in England supports 1,520 full time equivalent jobs. 700 are directly involved with grouse moor management and a further 820 jobs in related services and industries.
- 4.3 Weardale Estates Ltd employ 12 full time staff, 9 of whom are directly employed as a result of grouse shooting. The Estate also employs 8 full time seasonal staff and on average, provides an additional 1,250 days of seasonal work to beaters, flankers and other shoot staff each year. Grouse related employment costs alone are in the region of £500,000 each year – this is significant to those who live and work in the area.

- 4.3 It is difficult to imagine what other industry would be capable of matching or surpassing the contribution grouse shooting makes to the local economy in rural upland areas. Many livelihoods depend upon it. Wildlife and the upland environment are richer for it.
- 4.4 Grouse shooting is a legal activity and is managed sustainably and responsibly by the vast majority of those who enjoy it and benefit from it. The contribution grouse shooting makes to the upland rural economy and the number of rural businesses that rely upon it should not be underestimated. To a very large extent, it is thanks to grouse shooting that the remote uplands are alive with wildlife and the fragile moorland habitat is in such good fettle.
- 4.5 Grouse shooting is an important part of the good stewardship needed to safeguard the future of the uplands.

Weardale Estates Ltd

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