

[Defra sets out review into releasing gamebirds on protected sites](#)

The review will look at areas including the number of gamebirds released and their impact on protected sites, the consenting process, and whether further safeguards could be provided to protect sites. There will be no immediate changes for owners or occupiers of land.

In response to a pre-action protocol letter from Wild Justice in July 2019, [last September Defra accepted that in principle](#) the annual release of non-native gamebirds on, or affecting, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) is capable of constituting a “plan or project” requiring appropriate assessment within the meaning of the Habitats Directive.

Whether they will do so in any given case will depend on whether they may have a significant effect on the specific SPA or SAC in question. This will depend in turn on the nature of the activities, the features and condition of the SPA or SAC, the distance from the SPA or SAC where the activities are carried out and the possible effects of the activities. While not accepting the argument that current laws do not provide for appropriate assessment in such cases, [Defra committed to undertake a review](#) to consider the legislative arrangements around the relevant activities and whether there are ways in which their effectiveness could be improved.

The review is looking at the following areas:

- Consenting process: in conjunction with Natural England, Defra is reviewing the effectiveness of the process around Operations Requiring Natural England’s Consent on European protected sites in relation to gamebird release.
- Special Nature Conservation Orders (SNCOs): exploring the effective use of SNCOs in relation to gamebird release, which have to date been used as a last resort option designed to limit potentially damaging operations on or near protected sites.
- Legislative options: reviewing the current legislative arrangements that are of relevance to the release of non-native gamebirds on or around European protected sites, including considering whether any amendments to current regimes could provide further safeguards to protected sites. Defra is also exploring other possible options for regulating such releases if current arrangements do not provide a solution.
- Number of gamebirds released and their impact on protected sites: examining available data to establish an estimate of the number of

gamebirds that are released on or around protected sites in England. In terms of their impact on protected sites, considering available evidence including the findings from a literature review jointly commissioned by Natural England and the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC), and a scientific forum being organised by Exeter University, which are both expected to conclude in March 2020.

Defra will meet with interested stakeholders to give them the chance to input their views into this review. Once the review has concluded, Defra will consult with stakeholders on any substantive changes that are being recommended.

What to do if you release gamebirds on protected sites

There are currently legislative arrangements in place which provide for appropriate assessment of non-native gamebird releases on or around SPAs and SACs in appropriate circumstances.

The review will not result in any immediate changes for owners or occupiers of land.

The regulation of non-native gamebird releases will remain unchanged in the immediate term. Defra will keep industry informed of progress with the review in due course.

The Gamebird Release Review team can be contacted on GLTeam@defra.gov.uk for further information.

Further Background

Wild Justice recently issued a second pre-action protocol letter (20 January 2020) requesting that the government provides the timetable and terms of reference for the review, as well as seeking confirmation that it will proscribe or regulate gamebird releases within 5km of any SPA or SAC before gamebird introductions commence in Summer 2020.

Defra confirmed in its response to Wild Justice that work on the review is underway, as well as confirming that the review will include, though will not be limited to, consideration of the section 28E Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 consenting process and the use of Special Nature Conservation Orders (SNCOs) in relation to non-native gamebirds release, specifically common pheasant and red-legged partridge, as well as exploring other possible options that might be used so that such releases can be subject to appropriate assessment where appropriate.

Defra explained that the object of the review is to identify the most suitable approach, and that the government will not take any steps that preempt the outcome. Given the scope of what is involved, Defra stated that it is not in our view reasonable nor realistic to expect measures to be implemented before summer/autumn 2020.

Government takes action to cut pollution from household burning

Plans to phase out the sale of coal and wet wood for domestic burning and encourage the use of cleaner fuels in the home have been confirmed by the government today (21 February).

Wood burning stoves and coal fires are the single largest source of the pollutant 'PM2.5', emitting twice the contribution of industrial combustion and three times the contribution of road transport. This form of pollution consists of tiny particles which penetrate deeply into our body, including lungs and blood, and has been identified by the World Health Organisation as the most serious air pollutant for human health.

To help improve the air we breathe and ensure householders choose cleaner fuels, sales of coal and wet wood – the two most polluting fuels – will be phased out between 2021 and 2023, giving the public and suppliers time to move to cleaner alternatives such as dry wood and manufactured solid fuels.

These not only produce less smoke and pollution than wet wood or coals, but are also cheaper and more efficient to burn.

Today's announcement builds on measures in the Environment Bill which will make it easier for local authorities to tackle air pollution in their areas, as well as the government's £3.5 billion plan to reduce harmful emissions from transport, and efforts to reduce emissions from industry.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

Cosy open fires and wood-burning stoves are at the heart of many homes up and down the country, but the use of certain fuels means that they are also the biggest source of the most harmful pollutant that is affecting people in the UK. By moving towards the use of cleaner fuels such as dry wood we can all play a part in improving the health of millions of people.

This is the latest step in delivering on the challenge we set ourselves in our world-leading Clean Air Strategy. We will continue to be ambitious and innovative in tackling air pollution from all sources as we work towards our goal to halve the harm to human health from air pollution by 2030.

Sales of all bagged traditional house coal will be phased out by February 2021, and the sale of loose coal direct to customers via approved coal merchants by February 2023. This will give industry, suppliers and households

the time to adapt to the new rules.

Similarly, sales of wet wood in units of under 2m³ will be restricted from sale from February 2021, allowing for existing stocks to be used up. Wet wood sold in volumes greater than 2m³ will need to be sold with advice on how to dry it before burning from this date.

In line with feedback from the vast majority of respondents to the consultation, we will also be placing a limitation on the use of manufactured solid fuels for domestic combustion. Manufacturers of such fuels will need evidence that they have a very low sulphur content and only emit a small amount of smoke, with all manufactured solid fuels needing to be labelled as compliant.

Professor Stephen Holgate, Royal College of Physicians' special adviser on air quality said:

We know that air pollution causes significant health issues across the life course. It is key that the Government does everything it can to improve the air we all breathe. Today's announcement on domestic burning is a welcome step forward, and will in time, play a role in reducing the pollution associated with PM_{2.5}.

Inhaling combustion particles from any source is harmful, but more so than ever when it's directly within your home.

Burning coal for heat and power has to stop and strong guidance is needed to insist that if wood is burnt in approved stoves, it is non-contaminated and dry.

John Maingay, Director of Policy and Influencing at the British Heart Foundation, said:

Wood and coal burning accounts for 40 per cent of harmful levels of background PM_{2.5} in the UK, and our research has shown that toxic PM_{2.5} can enter the bloodstream and damage our heart and circulatory system.

Phasing out sales of coal and wet wood is a vital first step towards protecting the nation's health from toxic air. This is a welcome move from a Government showing its ambition and commitment to tackling air pollution.

However, we must not stop there. Air pollution is a major public health challenge, and it requires an urgent and bold response.

To further promote actions everyone can take to reduce the damaging effect of domestic burning, the Government will also launch a 'Burn Better. Breathe Better' campaign to highlight the negative effects burning solid fuels has on

health and the small changes that householders can make.

Through our ground-breaking Environment Bill, we have committed to setting an ambitious, legally-binding target to reduce fine particulate matter and are ensuring that local authorities have a clear framework for tackling air pollution – including making it easier for them to enforce of smoke control areas.

Our [Clean Air Strategy](#), which has been praised by the World Health Organisation as “an example for the rest of the world to follow”, commits to further measures to tackle a range of pollutants including PM2.5, ammonia, and sulphur dioxide from all sources, and we are working with local authorities across the country to help them target the pollution affecting their communities.

These measures come after statistics released last week showed the significant progress that the government has made in tackling air pollution, with nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide, particulate matter, and non-methane volatile organic compounds all down significantly since 2010. However, the statistics also highlighted the impact of the increased popularity of domestic burning on PM2.5 pollution, emphasising the importance of the measures that the government is introducing today.

Multiple studies have shown that long term exposure to PM2.5 can cause:

- Lung cancer
- Cardiovascular disease
- Strokes
- Asthma

These effects are amplified in vulnerable groups such as young children and the elderly.

These regulations will apply in England only.

The full Government response to the consultation is available [here](#).

Immigration system will support Scottish economy

By Alister Jack, Secretary of State for Scotland:

Our new borders and immigration system, announced this week, is good news for the Scottish economy.

As we prepare for a bright future outside the EU, it means we will be able to recruit the people we need to do the jobs our economy relies upon.

Businesses across our key economic sectors will continue to be able to attract the right workers. I'm confident they will continue to thrive.

One reason for that is our decision to redefine what a "skilled" job means.

Under the present system, only degree-level jobs count as skilled.

But we want to recognise many more of the jobs our economy depends on – and ensure people with those skills can continue to come to Scotland to work.

The independent Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) keeps a detailed list of jobs at a range of levels.

It shows which jobs will be included in our new definition of "skilled" – which is set roughly at the equivalent of Highers.

In agriculture, they include dairy workers who operate milking machines. As a farmer myself I know just how skilled those jobs are.

Butchers and slaughtermen working in abattoirs are also included.

In the fishing industry, not just trawler skippers but mates and share fishermen – experienced crew members – are all classed as skilled. So are fishmongers, fish filleters and fish processors.

For all those jobs, and many more, employers will be able to recruit workers from overseas.

The system will be less restrictive than at present.

Under the present system for skilled workers, people coming to the UK need the offer of a degree-level job, with a salary of £30,000 or more. Employers recruiting them must also pass a Resident Labour Market Test by advertising the job here first.

In future, there will be no Resident Market Labour Test. And no cap either, as there is at present. And the minimum salary threshold is being reduced from £30,000 to £25,600.

I believe this new, lower salary will work well for Scotland, not least because wages are higher here than anywhere in the UK apart from London and the South East of England. It will deliver the people our economy needs – and, crucially, protect the wages of people already living here.

Not all the jobs we need are classed as skilled, of course. But there will be other routes for people we've often welcomed into our important hospitality and tourism sectors. More senior roles in the industry, such as hotel and restaurant managers, are classed as skilled jobs.

In agriculture, we have quadrupled the Seasonal Workers Scheme for agriculture from 2,500 to 10,000 in time for this year's harvest, after listening to growers in Scotland and around the UK. The pilot scheme will be assessed with a view to making long term arrangements.

The new system will work well for our world-renowned universities and our burgeoning high tech sectors. They will be able to recruit the world-leading academics and scientists they need.

And the brightest and best students from around the world will continue to come to Scotland. And a new UK-wide graduate route will allow graduates to stay and build their lives here.

I'm pleased we have been able to devise a system that works for Scotland and the whole of the UK. Scottish businesses have been clear they do not favour a separate Scottish immigration system run from Holyrood.

I do not underestimate the demographic challenges facing Scotland and many other parts of the UK – problems of rural depopulation and the issue of our ageing population. But I agree with the MAC: the solution to these issues does not lie in unlimited immigration.

The Scottish Government has extensive powers over economic development at their disposal, and I'm committed to working with them to do all we can to create jobs and to ensure Scotland is an attractive place to live and work.

After 40 years in the EU, creating our own bespoke borders and immigration system is a historic moment. The plans we are putting in place will strengthen Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom in the years ahead.

[Prosperity Fund's Future Cities Programme launches in South Africa](#)

The Global Future Cities Programme is an £80 million programme, one of the several global programmes run through Prosperity Fund, sets out opportunities to promote inclusive urban economic growth and increase global prosperity by working around the three underpinning themes of Transport, Resilience, Urban Planning.

The programme in South Africa runs from 2019 – 2022. There are five individual projects within the three cities, providing technical assistance through our delivery partner, Future Cities South Africa, a PwC lead consortium comprising international and local firms.

Nigel Casey, the British High Commissioner said:

Our South African Future Cities programme launches in earnest this week, with projects in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. We're delighted to be able to work with these three municipalities.

The programme has been designed to achieve maximum impact in the

areas of transport, urban resilience and sustainable planning.

The projects are being delivered by a PwC lead consortium comprising local and international firms and experts. The Cape Town project focuses on technical assistance and capacity building around the City's Data Strategy to support evidence based decision-making processes.

Each of the projects is designed to address the host city's specific needs under the themes of the programme. In Cape Town, for example, the programme provides technical assistance in support of the City's ambitious data strategy. This project aims to further enable the City's evidence-based decision-making processes to inform robust planning and policy processes.

Launch events are being planned in each city, with the first taking place in Cape Town on the 21st February 2020 at the Civil Centre. This event celebrates the relationship between the UK Foreign Office, The City of Cape Town and the Future Cities South Africa consortium, and sits alongside the City's public launch of their Data Strategy taking place on the same day.

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- The Prosperity Fund is a £1.3 billion, cross-government fund, which promotes growth and prosperity in developing and middle-income countries. The Fund launched in 2015 and will run up until 2023.
- The fund focuses on the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and aims to promote poverty reduction and sustainable and inclusive urban growth within the beneficiary countries.

Saudi Arabia: finalists for the Study UK Alumni Awards 2019-20 announced

The finalists were selected from around 1,000 applicants from around the world, for their outstanding achievements as business professionals,

entrepreneurs and community leaders, and for their important contribution to strengthening collaborative ties between the UK and Saudi Arabia. The 3 award winners will be announced at a ceremony hosted by the British Ambassador on 10 March 2020.

Richard Oppenheim, Chargé d’Affaires, British Embassy Riyadh said:

I am delighted to announce the finalists for the Study UK Alumni Awards 2020. This award celebrates the achievements of outstanding Saudi women and men who studied in the UK and are using their education to make a positive impact. As strategic partners for Vision 2030, we are proud of their achievements and contribution to their country. My congratulations to all our finalists and I look forward to meeting them at the Award ceremony.

Eilidh Kennedy McLean, Director of the British Council in Saudi Arabia said:

The Study UK Alumni Awards provide a platform for recognising and celebrating the success of Saudi alumni of UK Universities. Their achievements are wide-ranging and inspirational, and which are directly contributing to the realisation of Vision 2030 goals and aspirations.

The prestigious international award celebrates UK higher education and the achievements of UK alumni all over the world. Now in its sixth year, the award received from around 1,000 applicants from international UK alumni in more than 100 countries, representing more than 120 UK higher education institutions across the UK.

The finalists of the **Professional Achievement Award**, which recognises alumni who have distinguished themselves through exemplary leadership in their professional field, are:

1. Dr. Adnan Alahmadi – University College London
2. Dr. Samar Khan – Nottingham Trent University
3. Ms. Sumaya Fatani – University of St. Andrews

The finalists of the **Entrepreneurial Award**, which highlights alumni who have played a leading role in innovation, are:

1. Mr. Abdulaziz Alsaeed – Newcastle University
2. Ms. Nelly Attar – Kingston University
3. Ms. Noor Alrayes – City, University of London

The finalists of the **Social Impact Award**, which acknowledges alumni who have made an exceptional contribution to creating positive social change, are:

1. Dr. Israa Hakeem – University of Birmingham, Anglia Ruskin University
2. Dr. Faris Almalki – Brunel University London, University of Kent

3. Dr Mawya Khafaji – University of Exeter

This is the fifth year to host the Awards in Saudi Arabia and will be followed by awarding ceremonies in a further 7 countries, including, Pakistan, Kuwait and Turkey.

Read more about [this year's inspirational finalists](#).