

SCOTTISH SPCA

Scotland's Animal Welfare Charity

Franck David Esq
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Mr David

Response to petition PE1124

The Scottish SPCA welcomes the opportunity to respond to Petition PE1124 which calls for an amendment to the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 to ban the manufacture, sale, possession and use of all snares.

The Scottish SPCA is the oldest and largest animal welfare charity in Scotland and it aims to prevent cruelty to animals and promote kindness and humanity in their treatment.

All Scottish SPCA Inspectors are authorised by the Minister to enforce the welfare provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, and can report potential offences under separate legislation directly to the Procurator Fiscal service as a specialist reporting agency.

The published Scottish SPCA policy on wild animals and the killing and trapping of wild animals is:

Extract

General Principle

13.1

The Scottish SPCA is opposed to the unnecessary taking or killing of wild animals, or the infliction of any suffering upon them.

13.2

The Scottish SPCA strongly urges that, under the law, all wild animals should be afforded protection from unnecessary cruelty.

The Scottish SPCA recognises that land managers consider it necessary to control certain species which may otherwise prey on farm livestock or game, or may consume or damage crops or other resources.

Such control must always be carried out within the law, humanely and with acknowledgement that the target animal is an individual and capable of suffering.

The Killing and Trapping of Wild Animals

15.1 Snares and Traps

The Scottish SPCA is opposed to the manufacture and use of all snares and any trap which causes suffering; including leg hold traps, pole traps and glue traps / rodent boards.

The Scottish SPCA welcomes the development in recent years of a range of humane traps that can be used to take large and small mammals without injuring them. However, such traps must be inspected at intervals of 1 – 12 hours depending on the species and trap concerned and any animal found therein must be removed and either humanely despatched or set free.

End of extract

The Scottish SPCA gave a full response on the consultation on snaring in Scotland to the Species Management and Wildlife Crime department in 2007, which can be seen at www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/174964/0049280.pdf.

The Scottish SPCA also carried out a survey of veterinary surgeons, Police Wildlife Crime Officers and Scottish SPCA Inspectors regarding snares, details can be found at, www.scottishspca.org/campaigns/45_snaring , then click the link “survey of suffering”.

The UK is one of only a small number of countries in the EU, which still permit the use of snares. Other European countries that still allow snares are France, Ireland, Spain and Belgium.

Snaring has been banned in several other European Countries, in some cases for decades and the Scottish SPCA is not aware of any major problems that this has caused.

However, as the Scottish SPCA only actively operates in Scotland we are not in a position to give a qualified answer to what pest control methods are used in countries where snaring is currently banned.

The Scottish SPCA was disappointed when the Minister decided not to recommend a total ban on snares or to put the issue to the Parliament for a full debate and vote.

However, as a specialist reporting agency, the Scottish SPCA has to work with the will of Government and as such we have pledged to work with the Minister and his officials to ensure that the measures the Minister announced are practical and enforceable.

The measures announced by the Minister will in some way alleviate a few of the current welfare concerns, i.e. the banning of drag snares and the compulsory fitting of crimped stops.

Other measures such as the tagging of snares to identify the operator and the location of snares being recorded will certainly assist in the enforcement of the legislation.

All action taken in relation to snaring is reported to the Scottish SPCA by members of the general public or passed on from other agencies.

Calls are normally taken by Central Control, who are well versed in the legal aspects of snaring and will often advise the caller to leave the snare alone if it appears to be a legally set snare.

If the information suggests that it is an illegally set snare and an animal is currently suffering it will be tasked to a uniformed Inspector or to the Investigations Support Unit to Investigate.

A number of calls are also made directly to the Investigation Support Unit.

Since the Minister made his announcement in February the Scottish SPCA control centre has received 26 calls relating to snaring:

Two were simply seeking advice on the legality of snares.

The remaining 24 calls related to animals caught in snares and concerned the following species:

5 snared Foxes

6 snared Rabbits

1 Squirrel

6 snared Cats (2 found dead, 2 required veterinary treatment, 2 returned to owner with snares attached)

3 snared Badgers (2 found dead in snares, 1 required to be humanely destroyed)

1 Pine Marten (found dead in snare)

2 Dogs (snares removed by owners)

As can be seen by these figures half of the reports relate to non target species.

During the same period, the Investigation Support Unit received and dealt with 21 snaring incidents.

3 of the incidents involved the illegal use of self locking snares. The other 18 incidents had all resulted in the unnecessary suffering of animals due to legal snares being misused. 10 of these incidents related to the snaring of Badgers.

In every case a crime had obviously been committed but due to the current legal requirements it is very difficult to gain sufficient evidence to report the matter to the Procurator Fiscal.

From the 21 incidents investigated by the Investigations Support Unit during this period, 6 individuals have been reported to the Procurator Fiscal with a view to prosecution, 4 for Badger snaring and 2 for the use of self locking snares.

The Scottish SPCA is content that the introduction of the new measures for snaring announced by the Minister will definitely aid enforcement and therefore lead to the prosecution of those who abuse the new regime.

However, such enforcement can only take place after an offence has been committed and therefore due to the indiscriminate manner of snares, non target animals will still be subject to unnecessary suffering due to snaring.

Yours sincerely

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