

PE1124/CC

Petition 1124

Response from petitioners – March 2012

The petitioners would like to thank the Committee for again taking the time to discuss our petition and for its patience in waiting for publication of the DEFRA report 'Determining the extent of use and humaneness of snares in England and Wales'.

DEFRA research

As the Committee has been made aware in a letter from Lord Taylor of Holbeach (16.03.12) the research commissioned by DEFRA from the Food and Environment Research Agency and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust into the extent of use and humaneness of snares in England and Wales has now been published.

The report is an extremely comprehensive document with extensive information about snare use in England and Wales that clearly illustrates a widespread lack of compliance with current codes of practice, problems with welfare, and extensive capture of non target species. While the research was carried out in England and Wales, had the study included Scotland we are confident the problems uncovered would have been similar.

Some of the problems identified in the report were:

- No fox snare operator visited was fully compliant with the code of practice (CoP) published by DEFRA in 2005 on advice from the Independent Working Group on Snaring, which included representatives from Scotland.
- In a survey carried out by telephone, 95% of gamekeepers and only 64% of farmers were aware of the CoP.
- 30% of gamekeepers and 70% of farmers were using snares without any formal or informal training.
- 19% of gamekeepers and 27% of farmers were using fox snares with the intention of killing the fox.
- 53% of rabbit snare users set snares with the intention of killing the rabbit.
- 60% of fox snare users had caught non-target species most commonly badgers, brown hare and deer.
- 29% of rabbit snare users named cats as a non-target species caught.
- Methods of dispatch of foxes included using a rifle or shotgun, a blow to the head or using dogs.
- Snare related injuries included subcutaneous oedema to muscle haemorrhage.
- In one pen trial considerable prolonged suffering of a rabbit was observed which subsequently died.

The research raises a number of concerns including:

- Humaneness of snares was measured against the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards for restraining traps and in some case for killing traps: in our view, both of these sets of standards set relatively low standards of welfare.
- There is very little analysis of suffering and welfare problems encountered during the trials.
- The discussion around fear and distress is highly speculative.
- Very few conclusions have been drawn from the research and firm recommendations are not made.

The petitioners are extremely concerned by the findings of the study and believe this confirms our belief that snaring cannot be carried out in an effective and humane way. The report has highlighted a significant number of welfare problems associated with snare use despite the fact these trials were carried out under best practice conditions.

The report also highlights a lack of regard for the CoP among some users. While in Scotland, some of the standards set out in the CoP are now enshrined in law we still believe that a poor understanding of the impact of snares on animal welfare is not exclusive to England and Wales. We would like to suggest the Committee writes to the Scottish Government asking it to reconsider its decision to review its snaring regulations in Scotland in December 2016. In light of the research we believe the problems identified will be widespread in Scotland and a review is necessary far sooner than 2016 to assess this, and the extent to which the regulations are being observed.