

Letter to Mairi McAllan MSP, Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform,

Consultation on the use of dogs to control foxes and other wild animals

15 November 2021

Dear Minister,

Further to the Scottish Government request for responses to the consultation on the use of dogs to control foxes and other wild animals in Scotland, the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG), which represents the 50 Deer Management Groups which operate across the Highlands and Islands, does not see this matter as being of direct relevance to deer management. The hunting of wild deer with dogs is neither legal nor practised in Scotland, with the exception of the use of dogs for poaching which is unlawful and carries appropriate penalties. We do not therefore intend to respond formally and in full to the consultation as such.

I would however point out that dogs are used in circumstances where a deer may be wounded during lawful culling with a firearm. Although this is an infrequent occurrence, wounding can happen and an animal escape if, for example, a target animal moves at the moment of shooting. In such circumstances the responsibility of the shooter under Wild Deer Best Practice, the established standard to which deer managers conform, is to follow up and dispatch the animal as quickly and humanely as possible. In such circumstances the use of a trained dog is invaluable in following the animal by scent or blood trail and is often critical to a successful outcome, thus preventing the possibility of a lingering death. The use of such dogs is also becoming increasingly important in the control of feral pigs/wild boar which are now firmly established and expanding their range in several parts of Scotland.

It is important for me to add that the training of specialist dogs for deer involves the use of laying a blood trail so that the animal can learn to recognise and follow a wounded deer. This use of a training trail is distinct from what is referred to as "trail hunting" in the consultation. This is a vital element of responsible deer management that should not be included in any restriction to trail hunting.

It is of relevance that many of the rangers and contractors employed by Forestry and Land Scotland are required to have a trained dog available in the course of their work.

In bringing this to your attention my concern is that the valuable role of dogs in the humane control of wild deer may be overlooked should any legislative change be considered, and I would therefore ask that the training and use of dogs in following up wounded wild deer be specifically excluded in any new measures.

I would be pleased to provide further information on the above and indeed you have my request 16.7.21 for a meeting with you at your convenience so that I may have an opportunity to introduce you to the work of the Deer Management Groups and to ADMG, particularly in regard to the significant role that we can play in relation to the Climate Emergency.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Turnbull
Chairman
Association of Deer Management Groups