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30th March 2016

2002 Act Review
Natural Resources Division
The Scottish Government
1-C North, Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH66QQ

Dear Lord Bonomy

**MANAGING THE RURAL FOX POPULATION THROUGH UTILISATION OF A FULL
PACK OF HOUNDS FLUSHING TO GUNS**

I write to you as Huntsman of the Liddesdale Fox Hounds and sheep farmer in the Scottish Borders where I farm sheep over 3000 acres of rough hill grazing. Our pack of hounds dates back over 250 years, as do the breeding lines and as one of the few private packs of hounds in the country we are proud to kennel and hunt 36 hill hounds for the effective control of the rural fox population. Our hunt is also proud to enable all of our hunting supporters to follow for free, regardless of age, background, occupation or whatever! We do this to not only encourage support of this valuable service but to encourage the younger generation in our footsteps. We fund the hounds (food, vaccinations, vet etc) through a few fund raisers every year which are a well-received rural social event in our area for all the surrounding families.

I would like to voice my full support to the **current** legislation regarding hunting with hounds and hope that this continues in its current state as an effective and humane way to manage the fox population throughout the countryside.

Our pack of hounds hunts effectively within the law utilising a full pack of hounds to flush foxes to guns for dispatch. We can also confirm that since the introduction of the new legislation (2002) we have worked with our local police and have had regular meetings to ensure this and work collaboratively. The Liddesdale Foxhounds do not hunt on what is now considered 'the traditional' mode of transport for hunting i.e. horses. I hunt either on motorbike or foot and this is, we consider an equally effective way to carry out the job.

We know that the mode of transport adopted is irrelevant, it is clearly the humane despatch of the targeted species which should be considered and no consideration should be given to the preconceptions of the mode of transport that is used or indeed the type of clothes that are worn. Indeed for clarity our local pack is run by myself and other farmers, for farmers or land owners to serve a job that is required by them to help control this wild mammal.

As a sheep farmer, as well as Huntsman, I can confirm that fox control is entirely necessary, particularly leading up to the lambing season. I would like to also note that flushing foxes with hounds helps maintain the **healthy** fox population which we consider is paramount in ensuring minimum fox disturbances during lambing time. I know that a **healthy** fox very rarely disturbs young lambs and ewes and it is indeed the unhealthy foxes that are far more likely to do this because it is easier for them to feed. It is in this circumstance we know that

this form of hunting is effective; hunting and dispatching the 'weaker' or 'unhealthy' fox with a pack of hounds to guns. For clarity, weaker and older foxes stay in covert and rarely come out to lamps or snares.

In our large hunt country the majority of the country is farmed by sheep farmers with many of the farms surrounded by large blocks of forestry. The forestry provides ideal coverts for foxes and hunting with a pack of hounds provides the only viable way to flush them out and dispatch them successfully.

I would also like to note that we work very closely with Gamekeepers across our whole hunt country and some of this is within the Langholm Moor Conservation Project (25000 acres) and each one of them agree that flushing with hounds is the most effective way to extract foxes out of coverts when they have become wise to the lamping and snaring of the Keepers. It is an effective collaborative working relationship with the Gamekeepers, which benefits everyone.

I can confirm that we hunt very effectively within the law and during every hunt (twice weekly from September to March) there is always a minimum of three guns present. **I would also like to confirm that hunting with a whole pack of hounds is by far the most effective way of flushing out a fox. It takes a whole pack to hunt effectively – each hound has different attributes which have been bred over years and years.** Some are deep scenting others low scenting and it takes a whole pack to work out the 'trail' of the fox and effectively flush it as a pack. A pack of hounds could 'wind' a fox from over a mile away and therefore don't waste time covering blank areas. In a day I could hunt over 50 miles, in contact 7000 acres, effectively locating and dispatching foxes. This can be evidenced by the number of foxes that have been dispatched during each season since the 2002 Act.

I would like you to note that for us and our neighbours as farmers, hunting twice a week is the most time effective and cost effective. The hunting service is free to Farmers and Land Owners and Forestry Owners/Managers and an extremely welcomed service. This is opposed to snaring which is not only a cruel way to watch an animal suffer, but snares need to be checked a minimum of daily and other animals do get damaged or suffer if caught in them; night shooting takes hours or dedicated staff and is quite often not a 'clean' dispatch (animals do suffer if it's not a clean kill), it is also costly.

I hope that my points are considered and that hunting can remain in its current state in Scotland for the foreseeable future and not used as a political spinball for winning votes. I strongly believe it works as an effective way to control the fox population in rural Scotland and certainly does in the country we farm as well as that of our neighbours; I want to see hunting in its current form remain as an extremely valuable service to the rural community.

Yours faithfully

Angus Laing

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