

Ministear airson Cùisean Dùthchail agus na h-
Àrainneachd Nàdarrach
Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural
Environment
Mairi Gougeon BPA/MSP



T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Alasdair Allan MSP
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Our ref: 202000095087
Your ref: AA5291

13 October 2020

Dear Alasdair,

Thank you for your letter of 28 September on behalf of Comann Each nan Eilean – The Eriskay Pony Society (CEnE) who have sought clarification on the current situation regarding the Eriskay Pony breed.

This relates to a longstanding dispute between CEnE and The Eriskay Pony Society (EPS) over breed definition. As you mention in your letter EPS were recognised as a ‘Mother’ society in their own right in 2018. This recognition was approved under the then breed specific legislation, the Horse (Zootechnical Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 2008 (‘2008 Regulations’), in recognition of the Society’s full compliance of Regulation 4 of the legislation.

Previous to this, EPS were a recognised as a ‘Daughter’ society to CEnE. This meant that CEnE, as the ‘Mother’ society, set the stud-book rules for both societies, however, both societies had a different interpretation of the definition of the breed for Eriskay Pony. CEnE’s definition allows the registration of 100% purebred equines only (breeding animals which can be traced back to the original studbook), whilst EPS allow the registration of breeding animals with a purity level of 97% and above. This ultimately led to the breakdown in relationship between the two societies.

This led to extensive correspondence, over two decades, between both the Scottish Ministers and officials, to try and resolve the issues between the two societies. A substantial investment of time and resources have gone into trying to resolve these issues, however, we have been met with assertion by CEnE that EPS ponies were not the same breed as those registered by their Society.

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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In July 2014, the Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland wrote to both societies asking them to collaborate with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) on a breeding programme to ensure the future conservation of the Eriskay pony breed. At that time the Scottish Government were prepared to allocate funds to work with RBST with a view to ensuring the viability of the breed. EPS confirmed their wish to collaborate with us on the proposed research and, subject to committee decision, were open to investing some of their own funding budget towards the project. We did not receive a response from CEnE and at that point RBST officially ended their working relationship with CEnE due to a lack of transparency relating to breed data. Therefore the project did not go ahead.

In 2016, EPS submitted an application to become recognised as a 'Mother' society in their own right. After a detailed review in collaboration with RBST, we agreed that there was no legitimate reason not to recognise EPS and conversely, rather than endanger the preservation of the animals, we were of the view that they were helping to increase their numbers.

This meant that CEnE and the EPS were separated out into two different legal entities. Under the 2008 Regulation, as the animals belonged to different 'mother' societies, the legislation regarded them as legally, different breeds. This was and is ostensibly an artificial construct.

I note Comman Each nan Eilean's concerns that the breed definition directly impacts the reported numbers of Eriskay ponies in existence and the Scottish Government wishes to see a healthy and sustainable population of this native breed. With this in mind our role is to ensure that zotechnical legislation is implemented through the appropriate recognition of breed societies to carry out suitable conservation breeding programmes.

I understand that Comann Each nan Eilean are able to accept ponies registered with the Eriskay Pony Society into their studbook if they are designated as acceptable in their breeding programme. We hope that they are able to do so in the future to ensure the continued existence of this breed.

I hope this reply is helpful.



MAIRI GOUGEON

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