



The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

18 June 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Shooting and COVID-19.

We wish to highlight the importance and benefit that shooting sports and associated land management delivers to the well-being of the countryside, including the many individual participants, fragile rural communities and the wider economy. Shooting is worth over £2 billion per annum and supports the equivalent of 74,000 full-time jobs.

The way game shooting is organised, lends itself very well to delivering mental health and physical well-being benefits for participants. It is an outdoor activity in which relatively small numbers of individuals known to each other partake, and so, government-led precautions can easily be applied to ensure there is no increase in risk in relation to the transmission of COVID-19.

Many of the preparations for the forthcoming game shooting seasons¹ have already been safely undertaken in accordance with the relevant COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time. As these restrictions are eased, or indeed if they need to be tightened, our organisations are poised to provide rapid guidance to our members and the wider shooting community to ensure compliance, which to date, we have successfully achieved throughout the pandemic.

¹ Grouse shooting season runs 12 August to 10 December
Partridge shooting season runs 1 September to 31 January
Pheasant shooting season runs 1 October to 31 January

Game shooting is an activity which can easily and safely be managed, and we are keen to avoid unintended consequence of regulation which may impact the sector. For example, when looking at 'public exercise and recreation'; shooting takes place on predominately private land, where wider public access is managed. This ensures that any interactions can be safely handled, unlike an activity such as public use of beaches.

As a sport, it is diverse and covers many situations, from lone practitioners to small groups of individuals. Even on larger shoots, it is standard practice for people to be divided into smaller 'bubbles' of no more than 12 in size, thus reducing the risk of spreading the virus. Any transportation on the shoot will follow government guidance for safe public transportation. During a driven shoot, individual shooters will stand in predetermined positions a safe distance apart. Beaters (who push birds forward) likewise maintain social distancing well beyond two metres.

We would urge for recognition that larger numbers of people can gather for organised events such as game shooting, where the group size and identities of all the individuals are known beforehand and sensible precautions can be made to limit the risk of spreading COVID-19. We would like to highlight that unintended consequences of restrictions are a concern for the sector with regard to 'localised lockdowns'. We ask that where regulated activities such as game shooting take place away from the general population, in the open air and with robust risk mitigation in place, that these are not adversely impeded by measures to tackle future outbreaks of the virus, especially in neighbouring urban areas.

When looking at the economic impacts in the sector, it is not only those who are employed directly by shoots who will benefit from shooting going ahead this coming season. Wider rural communities and rural businesses rely heavily on game shooting. A survey of the game shooting sector conducted earlier this year indicated that participants spent over £80million on the food and accommodation sector in the 2019-2020 season. The importance of this, as we emerge from the pandemic, should not be underestimated.

The hospitality sector in rural areas relies on the many people who travel to shoots and stay overnight in the local area during the autumn and winter 'low season'. At present this is not permitted. The fact that most game shooting occurs outside the 'main holiday season' provides a real opportunity for many rural businesses to recover at a time when other visitor numbers are low. To be able to provide services and begin to earn much needed income from the shooting sector as we move out of lockdown is not only of critical importance to these businesses, but also to their suppliers.

In order for game shooting to play its full part in helping the UK during the COVID pandemic, there are wider issues around easing restrictions which should be considered. With the importance of visitor numbers in mind, we would urge that, where possible, consideration is given to the easing of travel restrictions to facilitate overseas visitors who would normally make a hugely significant contribution to the rural economy throughout the game shooting season. Enabling this will also require all police firearms licensing departments to recommence issuing of visitor permits for those arriving with guns to shoot in the UK.

Summary of regulatory changes needed to enable game shooting to go ahead:

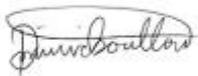
- Group size for outdoor activities needs to increase from 6 persons to 12 or more.
- Group recreation and exercise needs to be allowed, with permission, on private land.
- Local lockdowns should allow low risk activities such as game shooting.

- Overnight stays in venues such as hotels need to be allowed.
- Quarantine for overseas visitors needs to end.
- All police firearms licensing departments are processing visitor permits for guns visiting from overseas well in advance of planned trips.

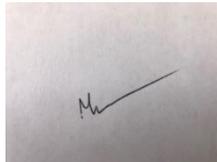
Ideally, and pandemic permitting, these adjustments need to be in place by 12 August.

The sooner we have clarity on the aforementioned points, the sooner we can brief the shooting world and allow preparations to continue for this very important rural sector to function.

Yours sincerely,



Dominic Boulton
Chairman
Game Farmers Association



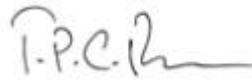
Mark Cunliffe-Lister
Chairman
Moorland Association



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NB: Please direct any response to Mr Eoghan Cameron, Chairman, BASC Marford Mill, Rossett, Wrexham LL12 0HL