

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017

Your Ref:

Our Ref:

Mr Graeme Dey MSP  
Convenor  
ECCLR Committee  
c/o Clerk to the Committee  
Room T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP



Mr Steve Johnson  
Assistant Chief Constable  
Crime  
Scottish Crime Campus  
Craignethan Drive  
Gartcosh  
G69 8AE

Tel No 01236 818961

ACCCrime@scotland.pnn.police.uk

Dear Mr Dey

## **SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S WILDLIFE CRIME IN SCOTLAND 2015 ANNUAL REPORT**

I refer to the above subject and your letter of 26 March 2017 to the Cabinet Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham MSP. I welcome the opportunity to address additional points from the Committee as follows:

### **1. Reporting year and identification of trends**

**The Committee would also welcome an explanation as to why quarterly breakdowns were not included in the report in line with previous commitments and whether this will be included in future annual reports. The Committee also recommends that these breakdowns are made public on a quarterly basis.**

The commitment to provide quarterly breakdowns in the Annual Report was made to the committee in correspondence on 26 February 2016 from the previous Minister, Dr Aileen McLeod MSP, a decision for the Scottish Government to make, as the author of the report, rather than Police Scotland.

With regards to making the breakdowns public, Police Scotland already publishes Management Information covering all crime on a quarterly basis, although this data cannot be classed as official recorded crime statistics.

The management information contained in the report is intended to provide answers to questions about current crime levels in the different parts of Scotland. All data used in the report is provisional management information and not official statistics because the data is extracted from Police Scotland internal systems which are

dynamic and continuously updated as investigations progress. This means that the report is unsuitable for drawing longer term trend comparisons of crime types. Those seeking time series analysis or trend information should always refer to the official statistics for recorded crime produced by Scottish Government on an annual basis. In terms of wildlife crime this is the data included in the Scottish Government Annual Wildlife Crime Report.

The management information data published must always be treated as provisional, because there will always be instances of re-classification and/or marking as “no crime” as investigations proceed. It must also be highlighted that data for previous years is refreshed ever time new management information is extracted and therefore it will differ from the data previously published.

Whilst it would be possible to publish specific wildlife crime management information on a quarterly basis, the value to be gained from this management information would be minimal given the low data levels and the provisional nature of such data as highlighted in the paragraph above.

## **2. Recorded crimes and their outcomes**

**The Committee is keen to have clarity in the reporting and recording of incidents and crimes. While acknowledging there may be difficulties in extending the recording beyond crimes (based on evidential requirements) and conviction rates, the Committee considers that in order to have a full picture of wildlife crime and wildlife crime incidents Police Scotland should consider using the information held by stakeholders and extend their approach to recording wildlife crime incidents to enable a full identification of the level of wildlife crime and potential wildlife crime incidents.**

As previously identified in our correspondence to you on 8 February 2017, Police Scotland is required to record crime in compliance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standards (SCRS). As such, Police Scotland data may on occasion differ from that of partner agencies which can record not only ‘confirmed’ crime reports but also ‘possible’ and ‘probable’ crimes, neither of which are, nor can be, part of the Police Scotland submission to the Scottish Government for inclusion in the Annual Report.

However, Police Scotland engages with partners through a variety of means including attendance at the PAW (Scotland) Priority Delivery groups. This ensures there is a transfer of information between organisations about reported incidents of alleged crime and a greater level of mutual understanding relating to the decision-making rationale around crime recording. As well as informal contact, more formal engagement does take place and as previously highlighted, Police Scotland now meets with Scottish Badgers representatives on a regular basis to ensure that allegations of badger persecution can be investigated where appropriate.

Further, all Wildlife Crime Liaison Officers (WCLO), the Scottish Wildlife Crime Coordinator and the Detective Chief Superintendent holding the Portfolio, receive a daily 24 hour incident report identifying wildlife crime incidents reported to Police Scotland. This ensures that the key individuals within the wildlife crime arena in Police Scotland are aware of the breadth of reporting and can address issues as and when they arise.

### **3. Badger Persecution**

**As identified earlier the Committee remains concerned about the approach to identifying and recording wildlife crime. The Committee welcomes the positive steps being taken by Police Scotland to better train its staff in recognising badger persecution and welcomes its enthusiasm to work with Scottish Badgers to better record possible crimes and share intelligence. The Committee encourages Police Scotland to extend this approach to all forms of wildlife crime and will continue to monitor this action and the results on the ground in identifying and prosecuting crimes and in minimising future badger persecution.**

As stated above, Police Scotland held a meeting with representatives from Scottish Badgers in late February 2017. A further meeting is due to be held in the forthcoming weeks to ensure that there is a mutual transfer of information about suspected badger persecution incidents. Dialogue already takes place with partners in other areas of wildlife crime through attendance at Priority Delivery Groups and through existing informal relationships.

In addition, it is worth highlighting that Scottish Badgers has continued to provide training to officers at Divisional level through a number of one day events. It is intended that this will be an ongoing process and further discussion will look to establish dates for 2018.

### **4. Poaching and Coursing**

**The Committee remains concerned that there still appear to be major problems with hare coursing and dogs and encourages Police Scotland to focus efforts in this area. The Committee would welcome further detail on this in future reports.**

Police Scotland has recently undertaken a number of investigations in this area of crime. As a result, individuals have been charged and reports submitted to colleagues at COPFS Wildlife and Environmental Crime Unit. Further analytical work is currently being progressed with the National Wildlife Crime Unit to look at identifying additional nominals suspected of involvement in hare coursing, particularly where this operates across Divisional and Force boundaries.

### **5. Conclusion**

#### **Partnership Working**

**The Committee therefore calls on the various groups and organisations who make up PAWS to continue to build upon these relationships and so that the benefits that can be derived from joint working are not diminished. The Committee also seeks evidence in future years of Police Scotland's partnership working with stakeholders. While the Committee saw glimpses of this in the 2015 Annual Report, it was not clear whether this was consistently the case across the board.**

Police Scotland engages with stakeholders across the wildlife crime spectrum, including statutory partners, NGOs, those from land management and conservation organisations. In addition to membership of the Priority Delivery Groups, officers

participate in training provided by, and to, partners; attend regular meetings of stakeholder groups; and utilise the expertise of partners in investigations through expert witness statements, scientific analysis and assistance with searches where appropriate. It would be of benefit if the Committee could clarify what additional evidence of stakeholder engagement is required for future Annual Reports.

### **Scientific Analysis**

**The Committee, while acknowledging the overall dedication of Police Scotland in combating wildlife crime, nevertheless notes a number of gaps in its work. This includes its intelligence on whether a reduction in wildlife in specific areas is due to natural changes to populations or reveals potential persecution. The Committee appreciates that this may require the application of resources but believes that this must be prioritised in order to get a clear picture of wildlife crime in Scotland so that the data provided in future annual reports is not just ‘the tip of the iceberg’.**

Whilst not in a position to undertake scientific study on wildlife population changes, Police Scotland will continue to engage with partners who may be able to provide such information in order to assist with future prevention and enforcement activity. The imminent publication of the Satellite Tag Report commissioned by Scottish Government will be one such example that should assist in addressing Raptor Persecution.

I hope that this response has been of use in addressing the Committee’s additional questions on the 2015 Wildlife Crime Annual Report. Please be assured that Police Scotland is committed to tackling wildlife crime and we will continue to encourage the public to report suspicions at the earliest opportunity in order to prevent further criminal activity taking place.

Yours sincerely

Steve Johnson  
Assistant Chief Constable  
Crime