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Graeme Dey MSP

Convener

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

Committee

Room T3.40

The Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh

EH99 1SP

01 November 2017

Dear Graeme

PETITION PE1615; STATE REGULATED LICENSING SYSTEM FOR GAMEBIRD HUNTING IN SCOTLAND

Thank you for your letter of 5 October 2017 seeking an update on the progress of the establishment and operation of the review group and whether any timelines have been agreed for the completion of the work, and also further details and the timescale of the research project to identify the benefits and costs of large shooting estates to Scotland's economy and biodiversity.

On the review group that will look at grouse moor management, I can inform you that I expect to announce the chair and members of the group within the next couple of weeks. It has taken some time to get to this point as we have needed to take care to find suitable people with the necessary experience and standing, but who have not been closely associated with views for or against grouse moor management.

The remit for the group has yet to be formally confirmed with the chair. However I anticipate it will be closely based on what I said in the Parliament on 31 May 2017:

I also want to establish a group to examine how we can ensure that grouse moor management continues to contribute to the rural economy while being environmentally sustainable and compliant with the law."

A Scottish Government press release further specified the intention to:

Set up an independently-led group to look at the environmental impact of grouse moor management practices such as muirburn, the use of medicated grit and mountain hare culls, and to recommend options for regulation including licensing and other measures which could be put in place without new primary legislation.

Turning now to the research project, I announced on 31 May 2017 that the Scottish Government will commission research into the economic and biodiversity impacts of large shooting estates in Scotland. Officials are currently in the design stage of commissioning this research. The impacts of driven grouse shooting will be a specific focus.

Although the design of the research specification is still in progress, it is likely that the research will need to examine the potential impacts of not only game shooting, but also of other possible alternative land uses for large shooting estates. We expect therefore to ask researchers to examine not only the costs and benefits of game shooting, but also, where applicable, of other activities such as generation of renewable energy, wildlife tourism, agriculture and forestry. We expect also to require research on costs and benefits to landowners, local communities, wider communities and wildlife.

This research will clearly be complex and multi-faceted, and the Scottish Government is working alongside Scottish Natural Heritage in its design. We expect the specification and the invitation to tender to be completed by the end of this year. In January 2018, we will invite bids from independent researchers, with the review of bids from interested parties to follow soon after. The researchers work should commence in Spring 2018 with final findings to be reported in early 2019.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roseanna Cunningham'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM