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Convener of Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
Scottish Parliament
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Dear Finlay

Thank you for the invitation to speak to the Committee on 13 September regarding bracken control in Scotland and for the follow-up email of 21 September noting the points that I agreed to provide additional information on.

Update on Next Steps, including development of the Bracken Framework

As Committee Members are aware, the Scottish Government commissioned the James Hutton Institute to undertake a Rapid Evidence Review on the Implications of Not Controlling Bracken with Asulam in Scotland. The report identified a number of evidence gaps which the Scottish Government has considered. The full report can be accessed at the following link: [A Rapid Evidence Review of the Implications of Not Controlling Bracken with Asulam in Scotland \(sefari.scot\)](#) (please note that papers I quoted when discussing carcinogenic effects of bracken and the potential impact of bracken growing alongside watercourses are referenced in the report, section 1.4 Impacts on Animal and Human Health).

On 29 August, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands and I convened a stakeholder roundtable to discuss options that could support solutions, as part of an integrated management approach, for the challenges that bracken presents. A range of organisations were in attendance.

Following the bracken stakeholder meeting and consideration of the JHI report, the following points are considered to be priorities in the short term. The Scottish Government is liaising with NatureScot to progress these actions.

- Producing best practice guidance: this work will go out to tender this month. It is expected that a small steering group will work with the successful consultant to produce guidance before it goes out to wider stakeholder consultation. This will be in place for the next season, June 2024. It is proposed that the guidance is UK-wide to ensure clarity for all stakeholders and will be funded jointly by NatureScot and Natural England.

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- Developing a strategic Bracken Framework: this will be a longer-term project, to be completed by the end of 2024. It will go out to tender next month. The best practice guidance will form part of the broader framework which will also consider where bracken control is needed, how it is undertaken and the required intensity control.
- Commissioning a literature review: to gather information on bracken control methods, timescales for seeing a reduction in coverage, effectiveness on controls and control strategies in other countries with a similar climate to Scotland. The specification for the project will be formed over the coming weeks.
- Creation of bracken mapping layer for Scotland: to gain a better understanding of the coverage of bracken. My officials are in contact with GIS teams in the Scottish Government to explore how best to do this. It is expected that this could be in place for June 2024. Aerial photography is considered the most appropriate way to create the layer. It would take some time afterwards for the mapping layer to be accurately updated and there would be an ongoing need to update as time progresses.
- Creation of a small working group: this was a specific action from the Stakeholder Roundtable. SG and NatureScot officials are in meeting with the Bracken Control Group this month to discuss this further.

Another specific action from the Stakeholder Roundtable is to ensure that the decision on the 2024 Asulox Emergency Authorisation application is communicated to stakeholders earlier in the year compared to 2023. I shared frustration in the delay in communicating the decision this year and I am happy to discuss with HSE, in due course, options for issuing a decision for Scotland as soon as possible, even if the other nations have not yet taken decisions for their respective territories.

HSE's report on the application for an emergency authorisation of Asulox

Emergency Registration Reports (ERR) are not routinely made publicly available, however the ERR for Asulox was subject to an Environment Information Regulations (EIR) request and is therefore published online. It can be accessed at the following link. Due to commercially sensitive information, some parts of the report have been redacted.

Link to ERR: [FOI+202300364758+-+Information+Released+-+Documents+1-10.pdf](https://www.gov.scot/foi/202300364758+-+Information+Released+-+Documents+1-10.pdf)
(www.gov.scot)

Please note that the ERR starts on page 165 of the document enclosed in the link.

I hope this response is helpful.

Kind regards



LORNA SLATER

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