



Scottish
Environment
LINK

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
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Close seasons for male deer

We are writing to you in response to the motion (S6M-10137) submitted by Edward Mountain MSP to annul the Deer (Close Seasons) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2023.

We are extremely disappointed to see this motion coming forward after the significant efforts that have been made by NatureScot and Scottish Government to consult with all parties involved with deer management, following the work of the *Finding The Common Ground on Deer* joint project between the Association of Deer Management Groups and Scottish Environment LINK, facilitated by the Centre for Good Relations. This measure to remove male deer seasons should be looked at as part of a wider package of measures that are now being brought forward by Scottish Government to facilitate sustainable deer management, while also maintaining humane standards.

Scottish Environment LINK, and particularly its six affiliated landowning NGOs, have been strongly engaged with the debate around reform of deer management for many years. Based on our on-the-ground experience of the destructive impact of high deer densities on regenerating ecosystems, such as Scotland's internationally important Rainforest, we fully support all 91 recommendations of the Independent Deer Working Group accepted by Scottish Government including the removal of close seasons for male deer.

There is no scientific basis for maintaining close seasons for male deer. Nor is there any historical tradition for the arrangement, which was introduced by the UK Government in the 1960s at a time when the red deer population was less than half its current size. Even then, there was opposition from the then Deer Commission based in Scotland, which expressed concern about rising deer numbers. Deer damage to habitats does not cease during close seasons.

This measure does not actually oblige any landowner to cull male deer all year round. It does, however, facilitate the option for those who wish to follow sustainable deer management practices, encouraged by NatureScot and Scottish Government in line with tackling the climate and nature emergency. The proposed package of deer management reforms is designed to deliver a range of public outcomes including native woodland expansion;



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protection and enhancement of peatlands; as well as reducing human health and safety concerns such as Lyme disease and road traffic accidents.

NatureScot issues hundreds of out-of-season authorisations each year to control male deer. This involves excessive bureaucracy, time, and cost to the public purse. The very process of applying for an out-of-season application can also create unnecessary conflict at a local level.

It should be noted that the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission and major animal welfare organisations are supportive of this change.

We are respectful of other viewpoints, but we believe that the removal of the male deer season is one of a package of essential steps towards improving the ecological condition of our upland and woodland landscapes, and allowing traditional deer managers and conservationists to work together to deliver public objectives.

We therefore ask members of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee to reject the motion to annul the Deer (Close Seasons) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2023.

Supported by:

RSPB Scotland, John Muir Trust, Scottish Wildlife Trust, National Trust for Scotland, Woodland Trust Scotland, Nature Foundation and Trees for Life