

Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity  
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Convener  
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
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30 September 2024

Dear Convener,

### **Deer management legislative proposals**

As you are aware, in 2017 the Scottish Government commissioned an independent report on Scotland's systems of deer management. The [report by the Deer Working Group](#) (DWG) was published in January 2020 and made 99 recommendations, the majority of which the Scottish Government [accepted in full or in principle](#).

The recommendations made by the DWG broadly fall into 3 categories:

- recommendations that can be taken forward without any changes to legislation
- recommendation that can be implemented via secondary legislation
- recommendations that require primary legislation to progress

Given the links between deer management and biodiversity, the Scottish Government has established a project board under the Scottish Biodiversity Programme Board to progress both the legislative and non-legislative components of ensuring effective deer management. This will ensure an appropriate level of governance and will also bring deer management into consideration alongside biodiversity as the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy progresses.

The project board is focusing on four workstreams: legislation; incentives; regulation and operational delivery and we are working closely with Scottish Government policy officials leading on agriculture reform as we progress our work on deer management.

To date, the Scottish Government has been working closely with stakeholders to progress those recommendations that do not require primary legislation, this includes, as you are aware, bringing forward secondary legislation last year to deliver the DWG recommendations regarding changes to the close season for male deer, and on the use of night sights and non-lead ammunition.

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In January, the Scottish Government consulted on a range of further recommendations made by the DWG that require primary or secondary legislation to enact. The '[Managing Deer for Climate and Nature: consultation](#)' closed on 29 March 2024. We received around 1600 responses and the [full analysis report](#) of the responses was published on 9 September 2024.

Of the proposals set out in that consultation, the following would require changes to secondary legislation:

- Changes to the female close season
- Changes to the rules around the use of shotguns to kill wild deer
- Creation of a Fit and Competent Register

The Scottish Government is giving careful consideration to the consultation responses on these proposals and is consequently not yet in a position to say whether or not we will be bringing forward SSIs to enact these recommendations. However, we are happy to provide the Committee with an update on our legislative plans once a final decision on these proposals has been made.

These considerations aside, the Scottish Government does not anticipate bringing forward any further SSIs relating to deer management during this parliamentary term.

Reforms to deer management that require primary legislation will be progressed through the Natural Environment Bill, as set out in the Programme for Government.

Yours sincerely,



**JIM FAIRLIE**

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