

Do you agree that common pheasant and red-legged partridge should be added to Part 1 of Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in Wales?

This change would mean that releasing those species in Wales would need to be carried out under licence. Please give reasons for your views. - Adding to Schedule 9

Yes. The addition of these species to Schedule 9 would be a useful step in regulating their release to the wild. Given the substantial increase in the number of released gamebirds in recent years, and given that voluntary controls appear to be ineffective, we believe that regulation via licensing is appropriate.

If these species are added to Schedule 9, please give us your views on whether our proposed licensing approach would be effective and proportionate? - Views on proposed licensing approach

We broadly support the approach outlined in the consultation. However, we have suggestions for some specific clarifications or additional points for consideration, as follows. (1) We suggest that the scope of "sensitive sites" is broad enough to include SSSIs and European sites where there are important reptile or amphibian populations that might potentially be adversely affected by gamebird release. (2) We would like to see a firm commitment to monitoring and research on the potential impacts of gamebird releasing both within and outside protected sites, so that future reviews of regulation can be informed by an improved evidence base. Whilst there is a strong rationale, in our view, for harmful impacts on reptiles arising from gamebird releasing in some circumstances, the evidence base for effects (whether positive or negative) is currently not as comprehensive as it should be; this position is largely reflected in the consultation documents. (3) We believe that compliance with the proposed General Licence is a significant issue in the approach, in particular the implicit assumption that gamebird releases allowed under the General Licence will comply fully with the GWCT guidelines for sustainable gamebird releasing. In our experience, whilst the GWCT guidelines are broadly sound with respect to potential impacts on reptiles, there is often a lack of compliance. Shoots commonly release gamebirds in areas where reptiles are known to occur, and where impacts might be predicted, contrary to the GWCT guidelines. We would therefore expect to see some compliance checking by NRW to ensure that shoots are operating in alignment with the GWCT guidelines and thereby complying with the General Licence. There should be dedicated resources to ensure good communication with the sector on the need for compliance, what that compliance entails in practice, and the consequences of non-compliance (presumably enforcement action). We suggest that industry bodies such as GWCT and BASC are invited to comment on approaches to such communication. (4) We suggest that NRW maintains regular liaison with Defra and Natural England on the issue of regulating gamebird releases, sharing information as far as possible, given that (a) the ecological and legislative issues are broadly similar, and (b) a divergence of regulatory approaches between Wales and England without a material justification is likely to be unhelpful for stakeholders. (5) We suggest that further consideration is given to substantial buffers around sensitive sites, including SSSIs and European sites, within which there would be a presumption against gamebird releases. (6) A further issue for consideration is that some aspects of the GWCT guidelines could be improved with respect to reptile issues; in turn that would have an

impact on regulation were any revised guidelines to inform regulation; this is however a matter of detail and not of major significance with respect to the current consultation.

We have based the proposed general licence conditions for pheasant release on the recommendations in the GWCT guidelines for sustainable gamebird releasing. However, the guidelines do not include specific density thresholds for red-legged partridge and there appears to be less evidence on which to base conditions relating to partridge. We have used what evidence is available, and expert opinion, to propose conditions for partridge releases. These are either based on a density threshold linked to the area of cover crop provided, or on density per hectare of release pen (as with pheasants), depending on how the birds are released. We would welcome views on whether these proposals are appropriate and workable and whether they could they be improved. - Views on conditions for partridge release

We do not have any particular advice to offer on this question and would refer you to the response by Wales Environment Link.

The GWCT guidelines include a recommendation that no more than one third of woodland with game interest should be used for release pens. This is to ensure sufficient woodland remains that can benefit from habitat management activities. We would like to include this recommendation in our proposed general licence. However, we would prefer to be able to define what can be included in the calculation. Do you have suggestions for how this might be achieved? - View on including a limit on woodland used for pens

We support the proposal to limit the area used for releases. We do not have any particular views on how it should be implemented.

Location and density appear to be the main factors influencing the environmental impact of releases, but we recognise that smaller releases in less sensitive areas are likely to present reduced risks. It may be appropriate that small gamebird releases taking place away from sensitive protected sites and their buffer zones are not subject to the same general licence conditions that apply to larger releases. Do you think this is something we should consider? Please give reasons - Views on taking a lighter touch approach for small releases

We broadly support the concept of less stringent regulation for smaller scale releases away from sensitive sites, given that a lower risk of harm would be expected. The possible debate would be around the detailed definitions of "small-scale" release, "sensitive" sites, and the distance from sensitive sites. We believe that appropriate definitions could be arrived at through a combination of literature review and expert judgment. We suggest that the definitions are kept under review as the evidence base is enhanced. We would suggest that monitoring of releasing and impacts is undertaken at a sample of these smaller release locations, to help inform future regulation reviews.

Could the proposals affect opportunities for people to use the Welsh language?

- Welsh language considerations

Is there a way we can increase the use of Welsh or provide more opportunities for people to use the Welsh language? - If yes, please explain in the box below

Are there any aspects of the proposals that could disadvantage people in using the Welsh language? - If yes, please explain the effects and how they could be mitigated

Do you believe the proposals treats the Welsh language less favourably than the English language? - If yes, please explain in the box below