



**Aim to
Sustain** | Protect.
Preserve.
Promote.

aimtosustain.org.uk

The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State
Defra
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

27 October 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

We write to introduce you to Aim to Sustain, a partnership of nine leading countryside organisations, with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) as its scientific advisor, which works to promote and protect sustainable game management and the associated benefits to wildlife and habitats. The game shooting community influences the management of two-thirds of the UK's rural landscape, so it is a vital partner that can help the government realise its environmental ambitions.

Aim to Sustain formed in the summer of 2021. Its key objective is to coordinate the work that already takes place within each of our organisations. These organisations contain leading experts in various fields, who provide unrivalled knowledge and experience of the benefits that can be delivered in wider biodiversity and habitat recovery. Sustainable game management and shooting deliver real and measurable net gain for native wildlife and Aim to Sustain is committed to promoting continuous development and improvement of standards.

Your predecessor spoke recently at the Conservative Party conference of the importance of growth in the environmental and conservation space. Shooting is key to that, adding around £2.5 billion a year to the UK economy and investing £250 million and 3.9 million workdays each year in conservation – the equivalent of 16,000 full-time jobs. It also brings significant health and social benefits.

Game meat is healthy, nutritious and sustainable. We believe it should be a key plank of the government's food agenda. The voluntary, industry-led five-year transition away from the use of lead in shotgun ammunition for live quarry shooting is progressing well both in the uplands and lowlands. A significant number of shoots are now entirely lead-free, which improves the attractiveness of game meat to consumers. The game management and shooting sector is subject to a plethora of regulation, both statutory and self-imposed, including self-regulation initiatives such as the independent assurance scheme introduced by British Game Assurance.

The Aim to Sustain partners have provided expert knowledge to government in recent years on key issues such as general licences and avian influenza. We would be delighted to meet with you as a partnership to discuss issues currently presenting concern to our community as well as matters we expect will be on the government agenda in the medium to long term.



Our community realises that avian influenza is a very significant threat, and all precautions must be taken to mitigate its impact. The sector has a track record of cooperation with government spanning many years, backing implementation of measures such as Avian Influenza Prevention Zones. Our organisations have – and will continue to have – a representative on Defra’s National Avian Disease Core Group; we have concerns about avian influenza management for this season and the next. Defra’s own risk assessment has already concluded that shooting activity presents a very low risk of spreading infection.

At the Conservative Party conference, BASC chairman Eoghan Cameron spoke of the need for a living and working countryside, unencumbered by excessive red tape and damaging regulation, such as the regular over-application of the precautionary principle.

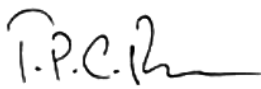
In the uplands, for example, our community has felt burdened by this bureaucracy for many years, despite the remarkable, well-evidenced investment in time and money to improve conservation, biodiversity and habitat. According to police statistics, the number of active raptor persecution cases in grouse moor areas is in decline and in Scotland persecution linked to grouse moor management has been largely eradicated. Indeed, data shows that raptor populations are increasing on grouse moors across the UK. Despite hundreds of alleged breaches of heather burning regulations on protected sites, just one formal letter of warning, and only for a technical infringement, had to be issued in England by Defra, and none at all in Scotland. Our hard-working moorland managers respect the changes and do their best to comply. This year, the Hen Harrier Recovery Plan saw 119 chicks fledge from 49 nesting attempts across a massively increased range in the north of England. This positive work takes place as a direct result of legitimate, well-managed grouse moor management in our iconic uplands.

Aim to Sustain is proud of the work all our organisations do on the ground and the research that underpins our best-practice actions. Our partner organisations would be delighted to have the opportunity to discuss this further with you.

Yours sincerely,



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BASC



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Countryside Alliance



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