



LEAGUE
AGAINST CRUEL SPORTS

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
London, SW1A 2HB

5 September 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your appointment last week as Secretary of State for Defence. I write to draw your attention to an issue on which I hope that we can find common ground, particularly as you have previously expressed the "absolute insanity" of supporting hunting, following our General Election campaign on the issue in 2017.

As you may be aware, the Ministry of Defence continues to allow hunting on its land, with 22 licenses issued for 'trail' hunting in 2022. This is despite foxes being killed and serious concerns raised by MOD officials regarding the conduct of hunts on its land.

As an example, a huntsman from the Royal Artillery Hunt was charged last year with an alleged hunting offence on MOD land after being filmed by independent monitors, with the case only not proceeding to court due to a basic administrative error. The hunt is subsidised by the MOD.

Trail hunting is widely believed to be cover for actual hunting – the chasing and killing of wild mammals with dogs. Following a string of high-profile media exposes of illegal hunting, the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) lead on foxhunting crime recently highlighted that "illegal hunting is still common practice", with trail hunting "used as a smokescreen for continuing illegal hunting".

It is this understanding which led the Scottish Government to ban trail hunting this year, and the major institutional and government landowners including Forestry England, Natural Resources Wales and the National Trust to ban or suspend trail hunting on their land.

The Ministry of Defence is now the outlier in actively permitting this activity which endangers wildlife and risks facilitating illegal activity on Government land. Your predecessor's unilateral cancellation of an information sharing agreement we held with your department has also diminished the ability to peacefully and lawfully monitor the activity of hunts on MOD land. Numerous questions have since been raised in Parliament and the Information Commissioners Office will shortly issue a Decision Notice if the reasons for this decision are not released to me.

Hunt licences are issued in your name, and your department holds an agreement which you have the power to revoke. With the beginning of the fox hunting season in November nearly upon us, I hope that you can agree to end the licensing of trail hunting, before wild animals are subjected to another year of being chased and killed with dogs on the land for which you are now responsible. Continuing to allow it would enable the wholesale and organised flouting of the law by hunts and the animal cruelty it entails.

I have recently formed the Time for Change Coalition Against Hunting. Counting many millions of members of the public in our joint supporter base, it is likely the largest campaign to be brought on any subject in the UK. As a former Army Commanding Officer with former colleagues now serving in your staff, (and as a former List member myself) I trust we can meet to find a way forward in the near future, rather than perpetuate your predecessor's mistakes.

I urge you to get this issue settled early.

AR KNOTT MBE
CEO

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Andy

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