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Animal Concern is a pressure group registered as a non-profit making Limited Company  
(Co. No. SC109126) established in 1988 as Animal Concern (Scotland) Ltd.  
It incorporates the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society which was founded in 1876.

To Animal Concern, Animal Concern Advice Line and Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society supporters.

Dear Supporter,

Nearly a fortnight ago the Scottish Parliament made some important changes to penalties for breaching animal protection laws in Scotland. Sincere thanks to the many of you who lobbied your MSPs and/or Government Ministers prior to the Bill being presented to Parliament for the Stage Three (final) debate.

Changes voted through on the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill mean people who break existing laws on animal abuse will soon face the possibility of much larger fines and longer prison sentences. This is something to celebrate but we will only know how much of a difference this will make when we see courts starting to issue these new harder sentences.

The Parliament, and perhaps more importantly the Government, also made it quite obvious that it is terrified of bringing in new wildlife and animal protection laws which might upset landowners and shooting estates. There was much rejoicing and self-congratulating going on after the debate on the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill. I didn't participate.

One of the big "achievements" which had various organisations wetting their pants and issuing fund raising appeals was obtaining "protected status" for Mountain Hares. The celebrations reminded me of another round of back slapping I did not participate in about a year ago. The animal given "protection" then was the beaver.

One of several proposed amendments voted out last week was one to stop the killing of those "protected" beavers. Since being given Government "protection" at least 87 beavers, about 18% of the Tayside population, have been shot under Government licences. Similarly our now "protected" Mountain Hares will continue to be killed just so long as the shooters first get a Government licence. It reminds me of the law brought in to "protect" seals in 2011. At least a thousand "protected" seals have been killed since then by shooters holding freely available Government licences. Nobody knows exactly how many seals have been shot as Government statistics rely on the shooters filling in an "honesty box" style return.

While not surprised by the fake protection given to Mountain Hares I was saddened that organisations and individuals who fought a hard, dangerous and excellent campaign to stop the slaughter of these animals appeared to make the Scottish Government look good by endorsing a very flawed outcome totally unworthy of the campaign they mounted.

I think my concerns are borne out by a couple of recent comments.

Writing as an MSP to one of her constituents, Roseanna Cunningham, Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, was unnecessarily critical of the way Green MSP Alison Johnston had tabled her amendment to protect Mountain Hares.

She also said (*emphasised* by me);

***“The Scottish Government accepts that mountain hare numbers need to be controlled in some circumstances. For example, control measures may be required to protect trees, control the spread of disease and protect crops. However, the Scottish Government has always maintained that large-scale culls of mountain hare are not acceptable if they threaten their conservation status.”***

This means licenses will be granted to allow large numbers of hares to be killed to guard against the (most likely non-existent) risk of hares spreading ticks which might cause disease in grouse, just so long as the shooters leave enough hares to avoid making them extinct.

MSP Cunningham finished by saying; ***“I supported the amendment*** as it strikes an appropriate balance between ***the interests of those involved in legitimate land management*** and protecting an iconic Scottish species.” In other words the SNP supported the protection of Mountain Hares because that protection contains a licensing loophole you could drive a trailer full of dead hares through.

Sadly I find myself in partial agreement with Dr Conor O’Gorman, head of policy and campaigns at the not very aptly named British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC). A few days ago he said: ***“Celebrations by the Green Party and the animal rights charity OneKind following a vote in the Scottish Parliament to grant the mountain hare full protection will not last long.”*** ..... ***“Scottish ministers have already recognised the necessity of a licensing system for control*** to avoid damage to the environment and mass deaths through starvation or disease. ***This is not a win for animal welfare just more red tape*** ....”

BASC are good friends of the Government and know all about licensed “management” schemes. When Animal Concern Advice Line exposed the extreme cruelty and suffering caused by the ineptitude of the gunmen employed by SNH to slaughter geese in the Government licensed Islay goose management scheme, an SNH spokesperson said of our video evidence: “We have had these videos reviewed by an independent shooting expert who

has confirmed that our skilled marksmen are following best practice in carrying out their role.”

Using Freedom of Information laws I discovered SNH failed to mention the “independent shooting expert” was from BASC and it was BASC who trained the shooters for SNH! To see just how inept the SNH goose cullers were and the cruelty and suffering they caused, please see my report on the Animal Concern Advice Line website. You may find some of the images upsetting: <http://www.adviceaboutanimals.info/newsjanuary2019article1.html>

As I said before OneKind and others ran an excellent campaign to collect hard evidence of conservation damage and cruelty caused to Mountain Hare and other animals and birds by those involved in organised game shooting. They have presented their evidence to the Scottish Government and that evidence has largely been ignored, just as Animal Concern was ignored when we exposed the extreme cruelty of Government run goose culling.

OneKind were mentioned favourably several times when Government members spoke at the debate last week. It reminded me of the run-up to the Bill which became the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. In 1980 when I started working for the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society (SAVS) I spent one day a week with Clive Hollands and Les Ward at the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Vivisection (SSPV – now OneKind). My campaign background was with Friends of the Earth. It was Clive and Les who taught me about the cruelty and scientific flaws inherent in vivisection.

However in 1985 we came to a temporary parting of the ways. SAVS formed a coalition with the three English organisations opposing proposed new legislation to replace the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 which was created to allow scientists to be cruel to animals without facing criminal charges. SSPV decided to work with FRAME (Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments), run by Prof Michael Balls who is now probably as well-known as Dad of Ed the Dancing Politician as he is as a world leader in the field of alternatives to animal research.

Clive and Michael tried to persuade Government to produce the best legislation possible to reduce suffering meted out to animals in laboratories. I asked them to instead join our coalition to fight the Bill. I believed Government were playing divide and conquer, using Clive and Michael to suggest the Bill had animal welfarist support. That is what happened. Twenty years later Michael Balls expressed regret at having supported what turned out to be, at best, very flawed legislation.

Also mentioned favourably in dispatches during the debate at Holyrood was the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Despite this, the request for the SSPCA to be given additional powers to fight animal cruelty was, for the umpteenth time, denied.

If Government deny the SSPCA extra powers to allow them to do even more of the work of the police and other Government agencies, the SSPCA should refuse to use charity donations to do the job of the police and other enforcement agencies. Instead they could monitor the police and others who have a duty to enforce animal protection laws. By highlighting gaps and failures in animal protection the SSPCA could force enforcing agencies to do their job properly leaving the SSPCA to use charitable funds to help animals such as wildlife casualties for whom no-one has a duty of care.

Perhaps OneKind should also put a bit more distance between themselves and Government and be far more critical of Ministers who pay scant lip service to the hard work OneKind campaigners have put in to expose the agony caused by snares and the cruel madness of mass hare culling?

I am sorry if I appear negative and depressing but I lost my rose-tinted spectacles down the back of the sofa decades ago.

As I am not exactly in an uplifting mood tonight I will also share my thoughts about some of the mega on-line organisations that have emerged over the last few years. There are so many now they are duplicating effort and therefore expense and competing with each other for your attention and money.

I'm not going to mention any names as I'm only making generalised comments. Some of these organisations provide excellent tech platforms where you can quickly use their software to create a petition or e-mail campaign.

Three or four years ago one such platform launched a petition seemingly closely based on our campaign against seal killing by salmon farmers. It quickly raised tens of thousands of signatures. Pity it was directed at the Westminster Government when the issue is devolved to Scotland.

Over the last year or so there has been a massive growth in petitions demanding Justice for this animal and that animal who has been subjected to undoubted severe cruelty or neglect. Earlier this month the same photograph of an alligator shot through with longbow arrows appeared on several petitions all calling for Justice for the alligator.

Many of these "Justice" petitions appear to be based on little more than newspaper reports of animal cruelty and are directed at the police or other authorities already investigating the crime. In numerous cases police have already apprehended the suspects and are in the process of prosecuting them. In the UK, if not in other countries, such publicity directed at cases where people have been arrested and are awaiting or going through trial, could lead to dismissal of the court case, the sadistic perpetrators walking free and the petition organisers being fined or jailed for contempt of court.

There is one thing most of these petitions have in common. As soon as you sign you are taken to a page asking for donations and monthly standing orders. I visited one site offering me something along the lines of a Platinum Card Membership where, for a minimum monthly donation, I could sign hundreds of petitions with one click of my mouse! I thought you had to understand and agree with the cause before signing a petition?

Politicians are not daft, well not all of them, and they are wise to the mega petition and the cut and paste email. Big issues deserve big petitions and heavy lobbying but if 100,000 people sign every petition, including the ones with little or even negative value, that dilutes the effect of very important lobbying. Politicians respond much better to personal emails from the people they know could vote them out of office.

It's not long since one mega petition site was selling people shares just like any big commercial company. Another one I looked at had dozens of employees on c \$50K a year. Some have turnovers upwards of £5M a year.

As I said some of these organisations provide excellent tools which individual campaigners could never afford. People providing those tools deserve a reasonable wage for the good work they do.

What I suggest you do, before donating money to any organisation, is to ask for a copy of their accounts. If they refuse that noise you can hear in your ear is an alarm bell ringing. Accounts may be found on their website or a Charity or Company regulator website. Check to see how the money is spent and that no-one is earning funny money. If a Petition asks for a donation think about giving your donation direct to the group running the campaign instead of the organisation hosting the petition.

I hope you found this email of interest and perhaps even of use. Feel free to pass it on to others who might be interested and have half an hour to bore themselves stupid.

I'm now going to start a petition seeking Justice for my mouse. It's knackered through overuse, neglect and low battery power. If you sign my petition you will not be frog-marched to a donations page but if you would like to join Animal Concern as a Member or just go on our supporters email list for free, visit our website or drop me a line:  
[john@animalconcern.org](mailto:john@animalconcern.org)

Take care and stay safe and concerned.

Cheers4now,

**John**

PS I first drafted this email a week ago but asked the Board of Animal Concern to read it before I sent it to you. I was concerned it might be too downbeat a message to put out at this time. Not one member of the Board asked me to change one word of what you have just read. It might not be pleasant reading but they agree it is something that should be said.

STOP PRESS:

<https://www.northern-times.co.uk/news/new-legislation-may-result-in-seals-being-shot-says-welfare-group-204265/>