

Deer Commission for Scotland

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Fiona Leslie
Scottish Government
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Dear Fiona,

Please find below The Deer Commission for Scotland's comments on the Scottish Governments consultation on provisions relating to muirburn dates.

1. Do you agree that in order to adapt to the possible effects of climate change on moorland, it is necessary for the Scottish Ministers to be given powers vary the permissible dates for muirburn in the future? Yes

1a. It would be very helpful if you could explain your reasons in as much detail as possible. This will enable us to examine the implications of varying the existing powers available to Ministers and to enable appropriate provisions to be made if this proposal is taken forward.

It is currently unclear as to what the likely effects of climate change will be on the mosaic of habits that are presently found over upland Scotland. It may be that due to climate change the ability of the individual species that are present to recover from burning activities will be directly affected. Future changes in the management of muirburn may in turn protect upland habitats from damage therefore safeguarding Scottish biodiversity. In some upland areas deer managers use muirburning as a technique to influence the way in which deer utilise specific areas of ground. It is understood that deer may favour areas of new growth caused by muirburn for grazing in the growing season post burning. This preferential usage of areas by deer during the seasons following muirburn may impact directly on the composition of habitats establishing themselves post burning. Changes in the composition of upland habitats may in turn affect the ability of these habitats to adapt to climate change.

2. Do you consider that there are any other amendments required to the muirburn provisions within the Hill Farming Act 1946 to adapt to climate change? Yes

2a. It would be very helpful if you could explain your reasons in as much detail as possible. This will enable us to examine the implications of varying the existing powers available to Ministers and to enable appropriate provisions to be made if this proposal is taken forward.

It should be within the Scottish Ministers powers to effectively restrict burning of any upland habitat at any time of year if said habitat is found to be unable to recover from the impacts of burning activity. The ability to enforce these restrictions should be based on the best scientific evidence gathered for each specific habitat with the same local conditions. These restrictions would enable the protection of upland habitats out with SSSI's and other designated habitats. Many of the Deer Commissions stakeholders utilise muirburn as a management technique to influence the distribution and health of populations of deer present on land under their stewardship and a balance between their objectives and those objectives in relation to climate change should be sought. Any restriction in muirburning over upland areas where deer are present will affect deer manager's ability to carry out a recognised management activity on a shared resource.

3. Do you consider that there are other climate change related impacts that affect how you carry out muirburn? DCS as an organisation is not involved in any muirburn.

3a. It would be very helpful if you could explain your reasons in as much detail as possible. This will enable us to examine the implications of varying the existing powers available to Ministers and to enable appropriate provisions to be made if this proposal is taken forward.

Graeme Taylor
Deer Officer
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