

SCOTTISH TENANT FARMERS ASSOCIATION

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Consultation on Provisions Relating to Muirburn Dates

The Scottish Tenant Farmers Association (STFA) represents tenant farmers throughout Scotland. It's stated aim is to support and enhance the tenanted sector and in that role welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the consultation on provisions relating to muirburn dates.

STFA acknowledges the Scottish Government's intention to amend the Hill Farming Act of 1949 to vary the dates in which muirburning is permissible. Muir burn is an essential tool in the management of moorland in Scotland in terms of controlling rank vegetation and maintaining the habitat for feral and domestic animals. STFA also recognises the Scottish Government's intention to assess the impact that muirburning may have on climate change. However, STFA fails to see that varying the dates of muirburn will have any impact on climate change.

STFA would suggest that more information is required before an informed response can be made to the questions below. What assessments have been carried out on the effect that restricting muirburning dates may have on climate change? To what extent do Scottish ministers envisage varying muirburning dates and what criteria will be used in making the decision?

What information does the Scottish Government have on the extent to which muirburning is carried out and the effect it has on the environment, good or bad?

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?

As stated above, STFA does not believe that changes to the muirburn dates will have any significant in mitigating climate change. Most muirburning takes place in the spring months; burnt heather tends to respond better after spring burning rather than autumn. To vary the burning dates may put pressure on land managers and lead to some uncontrolled fires which will do further damage to the environment.

STFA does not believe that there is any need to change the muirburn dates specified in the 1949 hill Act in the absence of any evidence that varying the dates will have

any impact on climate change. Moreover STFA would be concerned that Ministers' ability to vary muirburning dates may lead to future restrictions being put upon muirburning.

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?

Muirburning is carried out according to a strict code of conduct and STFA does not believe that there is any need to amend the existing legislation.

Furthermore, cross compliance through GEAC ensures that every care is taken to reduce any possible damage to the environment or any adverse impact on climate change.

3. Do you consider that there are other climate change related impacts that affect how you carry out muirburn?

In practice the carrying out of muirburn is subject to the available opportunities, given that there are only usually 20-25 suitable days in which it can take place. Muirburn must of course be carried out according to the code of muirburning which will take into account possible effects on climate change, the environment and the benefits to wildlife and domestic animals.

Angus McCall

Chairman Scottish Tenant Farmers Association

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