

Gamekeepers slam 'political' proposal to regulate estates

# Backlash over SNP's licence to kill grouse

TRADITIONAL grouse shooting estates would be subject to tough new licensing laws under plans being drawn up by the Scottish Government.

SNP Ministers are considering plans to require estates for the first time to apply for licences before they can run shoots.

Estates would face inspections and could have permission to hold shoots withdrawn if found to have breached their terms.

The move is intended to strengthen protection for birds of prey such as golden eagles. But some gamekeepers believe it is a politically-motivated bid to put an end to grouse shooting.

The sport generates £150 million a year for the UK economy. But

By **Gareth Rose**  
and **Kathleen Nutt**

Nationalist MSP Graeme Day, convener of the environment committee, has urged the Government to introduce licensing - even while acknowledging reported crimes against birds of prey are declining. In a letter to Environment Secretary Roseanna Cunningham, he said: 'The committee recommends the Scottish Government explore with stakeholders the need for and benefit of such a licensing system, how it might operate in practice, what it might encompass, how it could be appropriately enforced and whether such a system might feasibly be trialled in a specific area.'

Miss Cunningham confirmed an independent group had been

set up to examine the issue. It is the latest blow to landowners following draconian land reforms and the abolition of tax breaks.

Last year, David Johnstone, chairman of Scottish Land and Estates, warned legislation was being driven by 'raw anti-landowner sentiment', with his members the 'whipping boys' in an 'increasingly hostile debate'.

Yesterday, he said: 'As was demonstrated throughout committee sessions, licensing is not a definitive solution, with intolerable instances of crimes against birds of prey still existing in European countries with a licensing system in place. We look forward to putting forward with vigour our own proposals for measures we think can make a difference.'

In May, Scottish Natural Heritage said 41 of 131 golden eagles tracked



**UP IN ARMS:** Gamekeepers oppose the plans to license grouse shoots

by satellite between 2004 and 2016 had disappeared in suspicious circumstances, mostly in areas managed for grouse shooting.

James Reynolds, head of communications for RSPB Scotland, said it supported a licensing system as self-regulation had not worked.

He added: 'The failure by grouse moor owners over decades to self-regulate and put a stop to the illegal killing of raptors has led us to this point. Such a system would

include clear sanctions to remove licences if there is evidence of illegal practice.'

But a Scottish Gamekeepers' Association spokesman said: 'These activities can have serious consequences for gamekeepers and their families.'

A Scottish Government spokesman said: 'We are setting up an independent group to examine how to ensure grouse shooting is sustainable and compliant with the law.'

**GROUSE MOORS AREN'T JUST FOR THE LAIRDS** Page 43

