

Countryside Alliance Political Department Brief

Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales

(The Burns Report)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Countryside Alliance welcomed the publication of the Burns Report on 12 June. It provides a major step forward in rescuing the hunting debate from deep-seated prejudice, vindicating the civil right of people to be free to hunt if they choose, and enables us to establish greater public confidence in how hunting is conducted.
2. Hunting's governing bodies are in the process of scrutinising the report fully and will be making the necessary changes to address the concerns identified.
3. Unlike our opponents who have resorted to selective quotation and subjective analysis of the Report in an attempt to support their arguments, the review below centres on direct quotations from the Burns Report. We believe that the Report's findings clearly add up to present the case against a ban on hunting in England and Wales.

Animal Welfare

- At no point in his report did Lord Burns conclude that hunting was ‘cruel’. His report notes that there is a lack of scientific evidence about the effect of hunting on the welfare of the fox.
- Burns notes that hunting “seriously compromise the welfare of the fox” but that “**insensibility and death will normally follow within a matter of seconds once the fox is caught**”. When looking at an individual animal, any experience that culminates in death ‘seriously compromises’ its welfare.
- The only species for which Burns commented on the welfare implications of the complete chase was the hare. He stated “For a good part of the time, the hare may not be aware that it is being pursued”.
- Given that the Burns Report found that “farmers, landowners and gamekeepers consider that it is necessary to manage the fox population”, we need to compare hunting with other methods of control. Indeed Burns noted “The welfare of animals which are hunted should be compared with the welfare which on a realistic assessment, would be likely to result from the legal methods used by farmers and others to manage the populations of these animals in the event of a ban on hunting”.
- Burns concluded “**None of the legal methods of fox control is without difficulty from an animal welfare perspective**. Both snaring and shooting can have serious adverse welfare implications”.
- Clearly there are welfare implications for all legal methods of control and on welfare grounds no clear case is made to separate hunting as a method which should be banned.

Employment and the rural economy

- Burns found that “somewhere between 6,000 and 8,000 full-time equivalents [FTE] presently depend on hunting”.
- He went on to note that “Applying the principle that two part-time or part-year employees equates to one FTE, the total number of people employed by hunts’ followers may be some 70% higher than the number of FTEs”. This would equate to between 10,200 and 13,600 people deriving a living from hunting.
- This is compounded by the comment “However, in many rural situations **the loss of part-time jobs may seriously affect the capacity of relatively poor households to survive within their communities**”.
- Burns found that “Most jobs that are directly dependent on hunting are in the land-based sector. Some of those directly affected have specialised skills which would not transfer easily, and they would find it hard to find alternative employment. For these people especially, the adjustment process could be painful”.
- He continued “**For some businesses that are on the borderline of viability, the loss of revenue [arising from a hunting ban] could lead to a bigger impact than the direct effect may suggest**. For a small number of local communities which depend to a significant extent

on hunting, and where there are limited alternative employment opportunities, the effects could also be more serious”.

Social and cultural aspects

- Burns noted that “We do not underestimate the importance, for those who take part, of the opportunities for social interaction provided by hunting. Especially for those living in remote rural areas, it can help to counter the isolation that is often felt by farmers and others, particularly during the long winter months”.
- He found “**Farmers (and landowners) are at the heart of this activity. As a group, they are clearly in favour of hunting...** Some farmers tolerate foxes because of their own support for hunting”.
- “Farmers would lose the benefit of a recreation they value. In addition, **many of them would feel that they had suffered an economic loss since a free ‘pest control’ service would have been removed; they would expect more predation of lambs, poultry, piglets and game birds; and they would lose the ‘fallen stock’ service provided by many hunts.**”
- Also “**The social activities organised by the hunts form an important feature of the social life of those communities in which hunting is actively pursued.** For a significant minority, notably hunt participants and farmers in more isolated rural communities, the hunts play a dominant role”.
- The Inquiry commissioned MORI to investigate public attitudes to hunting in four rural areas; West Cumbria, Devon and Somerset, Leicestershire and Powys. This revealed “Only 25% of all respondents were opposed to hunting, the highest figure being in Leicestershire. But even there, the numbers were lower than those who favoured it”.

Drag hunting

- An argument frequently put forward by anti-hunting groups is that the pageantry and jobs generated by hunting could be maintained by a switch to drag hunting. Burns was unequivocal that this is not the case.
- He noted “**It is unlikely that either drag and bloodhound hunting or drag coursing would of themselves mitigate to any substantial extent any adverse effects on the rural economy or the social life of the countryside arising from a ban on hunting**”.
- He also identified a major stumbling block for the switch from quarry to drag hunting, “Although the findings need to be treated with some caution, the research suggested that farmers with arable farms are much more likely to allow access to the fox hounds/harrier packs than to drag or bloodhound packs”. This is due to the fact that a farmer receives no agricultural benefit from allowing draghounds across his land, whereas quarry hunting provides both a pest control and fallen stock service.

Conservation and habitat

- Burns found that “**Hunting has clearly played a very significant role in the past in the formation of the rural landscape and in the creation and management of areas of nature conservation**”.
- “Fox hunting has undoubtedly had a beneficial influence in lowland parts of England in conserving and promoting habitat which has helped biodiversity although any effect has been in specific localities.”
- “In the case of the hare, on those estates which favour hare coursing or hunting, rather than shooting, a ban might lead farmers and landowners to pay less attention to encouraging hare numbers. The loss of habitat suitable for hares could have serious consequences for a number of birds and other animals.”

Deer hunting

- The Inquiry commissioned a review of scientific knowledge on the effect of hunting on deer. The scientists were Professor Bateson, author of the report which led the National Trust to ban deer hunting on its land in 1997 and Professor Harris, author of the more recent Joint Universities Study.
- It is clear from the Burns Report that there is no certainty that stalking is a better method of culling deer than hunting. **The key findings of the 1997 Bateson report on alleged blood damage to hunted deer, muscle damage and a stress hormone have been overturned.** Bateson has been unable to sustain his 1997 conclusion that came out against hunting, taking into account the duration of suffering of deer that escape wounded and the hunts’ role in taking care of casualty deer, the argument does not necessarily come down against hunting.
- Burns concluded that “Because of the widespread support which [deer hunting] enjoys and the consequent tolerance by farmers of deer, hunting at present makes a significant contribution to management of the deer population [in Devon and Somerset]. In the event of a ban, some overall reduction in total deer numbers might occur unless an effective deer management strategy was implemented, which was capable of promoting the present collective interest in the management of deer and harnessing such interest into sound conservation management.”

Mink

“Hunting can be helpful in providing a free service to farmers and others that identify where mink are located, enabling them to target trapping efforts more effectively...Trapping is potentially an effective means of control but it needs to be carried out fairly intensively from January to April every year to have a lasting impact. It is therefore relatively costly.”

Gun packs (dogs used to flush foxes from cover to be shot in upland areas)

“In upland areas, where the fox population causes more damage to sheep rearing and game management interests, and where there is a greater perceived need for control, fewer alternatives are available to the use of dogs, either to flush out for guns or for digging out.”

Hare hunting

The hare is a 'game' species; hunting is part of a process of managing hare populations. Burns noted that "Numbers from game bags and hunting records indicate the population is stable". Burns concluded "**Because hare numbers tend to be maintained at high levels in areas where hunting / coursing occurs, the impact of a ban might well be that, in the absence of other changes, the population would decline in those areas.** This would partly result from a loss of suitable habitat, but also in a few areas, from the shooting of hares to deter poaching and illegal coursing".

Terrier work (used for fox control)

- "Terrier work seems to be particularly prevalent in Wales and other upland areas... over a third of the cull of foxes in mid-Wales is the results of terrier work... In mid-Wales, [control] methods involving dogs are currently effective in maintaining the population below carrying capacity and cost very little."
- "Terrier work is better regulated than it used to be and some of the reports of fights and injuries pre-date those changes."

Legal matters

- "Legislation implementing a ban might well pose some enforcement difficulties for the police. These matters should be considered by Parliament when examining a Bill."
- "Legislation to ban hunting might be open to challenge under Article 1 Protocol I (property rights) and, possibly, Article 8 (respect for private life) of the European Convention on Human Rights... Key questions would be whether the undoubted interference with property, and possibly with private life, was justified under Convention principles, bearing in mind the nature of the interference and latitude enjoyed by the national authorities."
- "An important consideration would be whether the legislators could point to unnecessary suffering or some other reference point beyond mere disapproval, to reflect the general interest (or, to the extent necessary, the protection of morals and pressing social need)."

CONCLUSION

Burns found that hunting with dogs has a role to play in pest control and species management, in rural employment, social activities and conservation. He did not conclude that it involves unnecessary suffering.

Liberty

Additionally, there is another key argument for the continuance of hunting, which Burns was not asked to examine; the principle of freedom and democracy. It is no part of the Parliamentary process to foist the prejudices and opinions of a majority onto a minority. Parliament should legislate to deal with activities which cause harm, not activities which certain people for their own subjective reasons, dislike.