

Cotswold Hunt Political Notes

March - June 2002

What's happening in England and Wales? - March 2002

Debate on Hunting with Dogs in House of Lords, 19 March 2002

Excerpts from the speeches of Baroness Mallalieu - Countryside Alliance President, and Lord Mancroft - Countryside Alliance Board Member

Baroness Mallalieu

"Last night in [the House of Commons] and here this House today, the Government have provided time for us to consider passing legislation to criminalise up to half a million of some of our most law abiding, deeply rooted, most responsible citizens, drawn primarily from the farming and the rural communities which are just recovering from their worst economic blow in modern times.

"Since the previous debate, I have changed my approach. I still believe that the Independent Supervisory Authority for Hunting, which I helped to set up, is working well and effectively. However, I do now believe that this damaging and divisive issue must be removed from the mainstream political agenda. In order to do that, there has to be public confidence in the way in which hunting is conducted and regulated and both sides of this debate have to be willing to move from their hitherto entrenched positions. I do not know whether that can be achieved, but I know that on the side from which I come there is a will to try, and we shall do so. Therefore, I shall vote against a ban, vote for hunting under licence and shall abstain from the third vote on supervision.

"I have been greatly encouraged - I should be grateful if the Minister would pass on my comments - by the universal praise I have had from local hunts for their DEFRA officials at local level who have been handling the licensing and permit system since

December. That shows that with co-operation and goodwill on both sides, a licensing system can be made to work well.

"I make it clear that any attempt to criminalise any of the present forms of hunting in the absence of evidence of cruelty would be wholly unacceptable and, indeed, an outrage to those who feel as I do.

"I cannot overstate the sense of injustice and anger which this attack is generating on those most affected. The Minister must understand the emotions in the countryside, after all that has happened. I refer in particular to Foot and Mouth and to the way in which those whose jobs and

homes depend on hunting, who volunteered and helped the Government in that crisis, feel betrayed. To throw a match o to that tinder would be divisive madness.

"We look to the Minister here and his colleague in [the House of Commons] who have been charged with dealing with this issue, for leadership because that is now needed. If that means putting aside some of our personal prejudices and views, on my side I am prepared to try to do so. I hope that there is a willingness on his side. If there is, the matter will be resolved amicably. If not, I cannot begin to foresee the extent of the trouble that will result."

The Lord Mancroft

"Noble Lords may recall that I was more than a little sceptical about the Middle Way option as it was presented.... We believed that the Middle Way option added little to the system of self-regulation and that it had a number of disadvantages. But it has changed."

"I hope and believe that we made it clear that we were not opposed to some form of statutory underpinning of the existing system, provided that the details were workable. There are of course some caveats. The hunting community has already gone some way towards regaining the confidence of the general public and the press and it is unlikely to sign up to a process that will, over a period of time, be used as a ratchet slowly to regulate hunting out of existence. It will not on any account throw coursing or stag hunting as a trophy to be done away with. Should that be the case, the Countryside Alliance will advise its members to reject the process. Any regulation must be genuinely independent, and that includes being independent of politicians."

"On the face of it, there may now seem to be even fewer reasons for adopting the Middle Way option than there were previously. However, times have changed. Since December, when hunting resumed, we have operated under a regime of permits although, for reasons associated with Foot and Mouth, that regime is somewhat cumbersome. But it worked and caused few problems. In part, that is due to the sympathetic and helpful way in which staff at local DEFRA offices worked with hunts. They are to be congratulated on that and we thank them. That has gone some way towards meeting the concerns that hunts had about licensing."

Message from Richard Burge, Chief Executive, and Sam Butler, Chairman Campaign for Hunting - 20th March

We thought it would be helpful to set out two key facts following the Lords debate last night:

* 52% of parliamentarians (MPs and Peers) voted against a ban.

* Of the parliamentarians (MPs and Peers) who voted over the past two days, 55% supported the Middle Way.

There is some confusion about what the Middle Way actually is and what the Alliance's position is with regard to it. There have also been some very speculative newspaper articles, particularly in the Times. We would like to take the opportunity of saying the following;

- * The Middle Way proposals voted on in Parliament over the last two days contain no provision for the banning of coursing, stag hunting or terrierwork.
- * The Countryside Alliance would not agree to a provision banning stag hunting, coursing or terrierwork. No discussions have ever taken place on these matters.
- * These activities are properly regulated and conducted field sports under the auspices of the Independent Supervisory Authority for Hunting (ISAH) and we will defend and promote them with just as much vigour as other forms of hunting.
- * We have indicated that our position would not unnecessarily reject some form of statutory strengthening of the existing systems and we will support the views and proposals of the Council of Hunting Associations.
- * We now await the Government's announcement as to how they intend to "resolve the issue".
- * Arrangements to reschedule a Liberty and Livelihood March remain in hand. They will be activated should any attempt be made to enforce this issue unfairly or unjustly. A march will be only one part of a larger campaign. We are in touch with a range of supportive organisations to ensure we combine our resources for maximum political impact and success.

A message from Richard Burge - CA Chief Executive, Sam Butler - Chairman CA Campaign for Hunting and Bill Andrewes - CA Vice-Chairman - 21st March

The Minister for Rural Affairs has made his statement on how the Government intends to proceed with the hunting issue in Parliament. A full version of the statement will be made available via the Alliance web site as soon as possible.

The Government has decided to engage in a six month period of consultation, which will include time to draft the legislation. The Government has asked for this to be conducted in a spirit of tolerance. They have also said clearly that the principle of any bill will be based on the Burns Report, especially on the issues of cruelty and utility (which we understand means aspects of land and wildlife management, and conservation). We remind you that the Burns Inquiry found no evidence of cruelty in hunting.

The old bill has gone for good. The Alliance will participate in this new process, and we will seek - with vigour and determination - to ensure the outcome is one which safeguards individual liberty, and enables public confidence to be placed fairly in the accountability of hunting, and in the conduct of hunting people. Any changes, or even discussion of those changes, will be developed and approved by the Council of Hunting Associations as the leaders of the hunting world.

No-one should read this moment as either one of success or failure. It is neither. It is simply a staging post on a long road, the outcome of which we are all resolved must be a lasting and secure peace for hunting as part of a diverse and tolerant countryside. We still have a dangerous and perilous path to tread, and our level of alert remains at its highest. No-one should doubt that the March is still available and will be used. But it will be deployed at the moment when it will have a decisive impact on the battle in which we are engaged.

Sam is already in the process of starting a period of consultation amongst the full range of organisations involved in hunting, to ensure that our resources are used effectively and in a co-ordinated manner.

When are we marching?

We are constantly reviewing the logistics for possible events in London or elsewhere in the UK. The March team is on standby and we are in touch with London Authorities to keep an eye on dates so that we are ready.

We will let you know in plenty of time of any planned events. The Countryside Alliance's resolve to oppose a ban is undiminished and we will not hesitate to re-launch a massive demonstration if political circumstances require - but timing is everything.

The Middle Way - What in essence is it?

These are some of the points taken from the recent four page document issued by the Middle Way Group.

In the New All Party Parliamentary Middle Way Group Document it states:-

1. Banning hunting will not achieve the aim of improving animal welfare.
2. Existing legislation needs changing as the current situation is hard to accept on either moral or political grounds.
3. The Middle Way proposals have been reviewed and radically strengthened recently.

4. These changes with the formation of a statutory hunting authority with licensing powers will benefit animal welfare while protecting personal freedoms.
5. The revised proposals are now less bureaucratic, less costly and far better for animal welfare.
6. Numerous Bills have been brought before parliament have missed their target of reducing animal suffering. However, a great deal of information has been brought into the public domain such as the Burns report and the Phelps report and various scientific studies, and these works should not be lost and instead could form the basis for a new workmanlike law.
7. There is no point, in animal welfare terms, in prohibiting one control method and allowing it to be replaced with other methods which are capable of causing suffering. The issue of hunting with dogs cannot be viewed in isolation.
8. If killing for pleasure is morally wrong , why was the killing of foxes to protect game rearing allowed in the hunting Bill and why were gun packs permitted in the Hunting Bill, and if killing wild mammals is to continue is it not preferable to have that killing done under licence, rather than left unregulated?

The conclusion states that The Middle Way proposals are not a compromise on the issue of hunting with dogs. They are a completely new way of addressing an argument which has suffered for decades from the protagonists holding extreme positions. Four former directors of the League Against Cruel Sports have now said that the ban option is not the best way forward.

What's happening in Scotland ? - March 2002

The Watson Bill (Scotland's Bill)

The Watson Bill received Royal Assent on Friday 15 March 2002. As we have previously made clear we intend to challenge this Act now that it has been given Royal Assent. If it is allowed to take effect, the fabric of rural life across Scotland would be damaged and the consequences would be felt by the thousands of people who enjoy our countryside.

New Chief Executive Position

The Alliance has announced it is to strengthen its management team by appointing a chief executive in Scotland. The chief executive will work alongside Director Allan Murray to ensure the interests of rural Scotland are given the strongest possible representation at a time when many

people in the countryside feel they are under political and social threat.

With this in mind the CA will be challenging the Bill in the Scottish Court and if need be then on to the ECH. To this end the CA is announcing a fund raising appeal. Details of the fund can be found on the CA web site (link below) or by telephoning 0845 602 4672. The CA has set a target of £1 million to help pay for this vital action. Those contributing will receive a car sticker in the post. Let's see if we can get one in every car !

The Way Ahead - 25th March

Thank you to all those who have contacted us following Alun Michael's statement on Thursday. We have taken time analysing the statement and can tell you that we will be making an announcement this week when plans are in place.

Be assured that none of us is fooled by fine-sounding references to 'tolerance' and 'compromise'. We will have a battle. We will have the opportunity to march and protest - and this will be before it is too late - but we will fight on our own ground and to our own agenda.

Over the past 5 years we have asked to be treated fairly. We have demonstrated peacefully and acted reasonably. We have won the arguments. We have fought hard for, and must maintain the support of the media and public opinion who sense a real danger to the country's freedom.

Living on an island requires us to co-operate with, and tolerate one another. Politicians who ignore this cannot expect to receive co-operation and tolerance themselves. The countryside and its supporters are up in arms. We can win this but only if we stand absolutely together. Anything less will throw the result to our enemies who have major problems of their own.

The Government's consultation process must be meaningful and public. Supporters will be given a chance to express their views in no uncertain terms so that the Government is left in no doubt about, and takes into account, the immense strength of feeling when drafting any legislation.

None of us is to contemplate defeat. The months ahead will require courage, nerve and planning. If it is a battle our opponents want then that is what they will have. Stand firm behind the Alliance who will give NO ground, provide sustained action, and we predict victory.

The gloves are off. Cometh the hour, cometh the countryside.

Briefing

The Government has announced a consultation process. We have a right to expect this to be open, honest - and public. If it is, we will take part in order to achieve a fair solution. If at any stage there is even the slightest evidence that parliament or the Government is using it in order to pursue a more sinister objective then they can expect the full wrath of all of us and all those who care about the integrity of our political process. None of us will tolerate being treated with contempt, or as pawns, in a wider political agenda.

Regrettably, we believe these points will need to be reinforced, and possibly at an early stage. Please be ready to respond to any call and we will keep you as up to date as possible with information on the part supporters can play in the short and longer term.

As it is, the new political process as announced may possibly last until the early part of 2004. In this Campaign, time is far more valuable to us than to our opponents. Having won the arguments for hunting in the Government's own Burns Inquiry, our case is based on basic freedoms which should be enjoyed in a civilised and democratic society. Meanwhile our opponents' case becomes more strident, demonic and desperate.

It should be noted that whilst Mr Michael's statement and subsequent comments in the House of Commons left a great deal to be desired in terms of clarity of the Government's intentions, it did not contain reference to stag hunting, coursing or terrier work, nor did it suggest a divide between upland and lowland hunting. Moreover the Minister did not announce the return of the Hunting Bill, which could have seen hunting banned by this November.

Richard Burge - Chief Executive, Countryside Alliance

Sam Butler - Chairman, CA Campaign for Hunting

The Latest from the Countryside Alliance - 28th March

An open letter from Richard Burge - Chief Executive of the Countryside Alliance

The events of the past few days have brought hunting back to the forefront of politics as a pawn in a repugnant game of political duplicity.

We have all tried hard to find a solution to this problem. It is not of our making. It is not the countryside that constantly raises hunting in the corridors of power. Continuing down this line means politicians can expect nothing less than the most determined, robust, resolute, and continuous response.

We have all been patient. After the Lords' vote on Tuesday last week, there was a moment when good sense might have prevailed. Even the Government's announcement might have given hope for a sane resolution. But the question and answer session after the statement, combined with the confused messages from the Government Ministers and their personal voting patterns last week, have caused rural people to mistrust seriously both the intent and the ability of Government to bring about a fair and just solution that wins the consent of the countryside.

That mistrust has now provoked a level of anger which must be brought to the attention of the Government. There is a clear attempt to use hunting as a sacrificial lamb on the altar of political convenience. Quite simply, we will not allow anyone to get away with that.

Government Ministers that we consider to be key to this debate can now expect their public appearances to be accompanied by consistent and determined protest by rural people. And particular back bench politicians of whatever party who have made it their business the use their power to impose their prejudices on others can expect the same treatment. Law-abiding, but determined, protest is a legitimate and important part of our democracy, and we will use it both to defend our rights and to maintain public support. The majority of people in Britain do not want to ban hunting. That majority must now become overwhelming.

I have tasked the Campaign for Hunting team to co-ordinate and manage this continuous and relentless pattern of protest. You will all be asked to participate in protests, letter writing, and lobbying. I ask you to respond positively and immediately to every request for action.

The House of Lords itself is furious at the weakness with which the Government is managing the issue, and the way in which a constitutional crisis has been engineered simply to pacify the Government's own backbenchers. When the Lords start to make their moves on this issue, we will ensure that they are backed by the most public and persistent demonstrations of support we can muster.

Finally, we have the ability to March on London. Government and Parliament should have thought carefully before provoking the countryside to launch the biggest civil rights demonstration that Europe has ever seen. They must ask themselves how this will play on the world stage. They must also recognise that it is part of our democracy and they have a duty to respond positively towards it. In the end, the votes of a few hundred bigots who have no mandate whatsoever for their position will not be allowed to triumph over the clear will of hundreds of thousands of people. The arrangements to initiate and mount such a march were put in place last week.

We ask for nothing more than justice, fairness, and our consent. Government and MPs have failed to heed that request. We will demand it through protest. They must now live up to their obligations to defend the liberty and livelihood of all. Our demand is modest but if it falls on deaf ears, our rage will be felt.

The sole object of this exercise is to secure a legitimate and viable future for hunting as part and parcel of our living countryside. No other outcome is acceptable, we will not rest until it is achieved, and we will do whatever it takes to secure that legitimacy and to win overwhelming public support for the ordinary, decent, and responsible people of the countryside.

Richard Burge

**Chief Executive
Countryside Alliance**

Message from Sam Butler

I entirely echo Richard Burge's words. The Alliance has called for considerable restraint from its supporters right up to the minute the Minister for Rural Affairs stood up in the House to make his statement - thank you for respecting this. We fully appreciate the considerable frustration felt by a significant section of our supporters and Alliance members.

We are all in this together. The fight we are facing involves everyone who cares about the countryside. The threat to shooting comes, not so much from the threat of an outright ban, but from equally harmful and increasingly restrictive legislation. Added to this is the warning shot to anglers in the PETA campaign demonstrating that the strident and well funded attacks by the animal rights organizations are not far away. These are hostile assaults on all of us, and spell out danger to all who wish to live in a country free from prejudice.

Key Points.

*** A plan is in place to visit regional DEFRA offices in mid-April to register our demands for a fair hearing. As the Burns Inquiry proved there is no evidence to support a ban on hunting. Richard Burge will hand the same letter in to Head Office in London to coincide with this. We have chosen DEFRA offices as symbolic 'post offices' to Government. It is important to remember we have many supportive local DEFRA offices who, in the past year, have provided outstanding support and professional advice, not least with regard to the resumption of hunting. If you are interested in participating in these visits, please ask your regional director for more details.

*** The Alliance continues to call for a public and open consultation and we will be seeking to make our very strong feelings clear to the Government in the near future.

*** Hounding the Ministers. The Minister has indicated he wishes to encourage full consultation. We therefore think it appropriate that we make our feelings known to Ministers at every available opportunity. As Richard Burge has said, they can now expect their public appearances to be accompanied by consistent and determined protest by rural people. Please be ready to participate and make your views known to Ministers visiting your area. Please contact the Campaign for Hunting or your Regional Director.

*** The March Office has reopened for initial preparations. It is important however, that the March should not be viewed in isolation - it is a part, albeit an extremely important part, in a long and sustained campaign.

This Government will rue the day it decided to take us on. A great deal of work is being done producing a programme of action which understandably we do not want to fall into the public domain at the moment. We will be here this summer, next winter, next summer and as long as it takes. For now, this WILL be a **Summer of Discontent** - I have no doubt you are all ready.

Sam Butler
Chairman, Campaign for Hunting

Gloucestershire Notes by Will Templer, Wessex CA Regional Director - 29th March

Friday 12th April we will be rallying/marching to our local DEFRA office in Gloucester to hand in a message to be passed to Alun Michael. The details aren't finalized yet but roughly if your Hunt received its license from the Gloucester office that is where you'll be asked to go. It's vital at this point that we ensure that this DEFRA office don't think of this as an attack on them - they have been very helpful indeed when hunting resumed - but rather as a postbox to the Rural Affairs Minister. Details of this event and neighboring ones to follow shortly.

Our London HQ has now had the time needed to consider our position and has come forward with "**The Summer of Discontent**". We will be running an escalating program of events which will include protests as above, lobbying, proactive PR and letter writing as well as I'm sure a March in London. To this end James Stanford, well known in Wessex as "The March King" and proudly so, has been asked to reactivate the March office in London.

A vital part of this SoD(!) is to ensure that any MP that voted to ban hunting is met when in the countryside and made to feel our passion in no uncertain way. To this end please inform me of any visits you may know of in your area - they must not be allowed to feel that they can come out of their ivory towers, swan around and say everything is OK. It isn't and it won't be until this despicable bigotry is put to bed. To everyone who was kind enough to write to their Peers and MP's a huge Thank You. I know it's boring and you've all done it a million times but it is vital and the vote in the House of Lords was their largest majority ever - proof enough it can work! A couple of final points. We nearly all have animals and as such go to vets - ask your vet if they support hunting and fieldsports and if so ask them to log on to www.vets-for-hunting.co.uk. A recent poll of rural vets found 63% opposed a ban on welfare grounds, let's see if we can increase this and fire another warning shot across the Commons bow. Similarly we all go to animal feed shops, dentists, doctors etc and spend a long time waiting - why not download page 2 of the facts and figures, and leave it in waiting rooms, on stable doors, at tack shops etc? We must get our message across first !!

Letter to The Times - 30th March

Gathering views on foxhunting - From Lord Donoughue and others

Sir, The Government's statement on how the hunting issue is to be handled, following the debates in both Houses last week, includes reference to a six-month consultation period. We understand from comments made in the House of Lords by Lord Whitty on March 21 that the arrangements and mechanisms for this exercise have yet to be decided.

We venture, therefore, to offer a way forward which we believe is essential if the Government's approach is to be, and is seen to be, fair, open and transparent. No one should underestimate the anger and sense of injustice which would be felt well beyond rural communities directly affected if this was not the case.

The establishment of a joint select committee of both Houses, which would call for evidence and take evidence in public, would give the consultative period a framework most likely to command public confidence. If this confidence is not achieved, we believe serious doubt will be cast as to the Government's intentions in proposing this consultation. This would be profoundly damaging in an already highly charged atmosphere.

**Yours faithfully,
BERNARD DONOUGHUE
(Minister for Farming, 1997-99),
ALEX CARLILE,
CARRINGTON,
CRAIG of RADLEY,
Bishop JOHN HEREFORD,
DOUGLAS HURD,
KING of BRIDGWATER,
IVOR RICHARD,
House of Lords.
March 28.**

Message from Richard Burge - 4th April 2002

At the press conference held in central London yesterday I outlined how the campaign was going to unfold over what is now become known as the 'summer of discontent'. The rolling programme of demonstrations and events will highlight the anger and unrest felt by hunting and rural communities over the Government's handling of the hunting issue.

Alun Michael's reluctance to distance himself from possible use of the Parliament Act on any future hunting legislation has simply inflamed an already tinder dry situation.

The press briefing has been significantly reported in major broadsheets today and touched on several key issues. Firstly, that a major march in London in the near future is a certainty, but that a date is being reserved for a little while longer. It was important to point out that we are not relying solely on a march to influence the political process but that it would be part of a sustained and escalating campaign. We will no doubt have to make our feelings known in small and large numbers, regionally and nationally, probably over a sustained period of time.

In addition, we were able to release a fresh opinion poll which has shown for the second time in four weeks that public enthusiasm for a ban on hunting is noticeably below 50%. Claims by anti hunting MPs that there is overwhelming public support for a ban has again been seen as nothing more than an exaggeration.

Certain journalists pressed very hard on the issue of where the Alliance would stand with regard to a hunting Bill that contained sacrifices or that made distinctions between upland and lowland hunting. In my reply I made it perfectly clear that the Alliance remains totally committed to supporting and promoting all legitimate forms of hunting. I also made it clear when questioned about the situation in Scotland that not only was the Alliance confident of legal victory with regard to the Watson Bill but that it would be seeking punitive damages from the Scottish Parliament as a result.

We also made it clear that the Alliance is not the only player on this stage. We advised the media that they could expect significant contributions to the campaign from the Council of Hunting Associations and also the Union of Country Sports Workers.

Members and supporters might also like to know that today Sam Butler and others produced the first draft of a range of events which will require and involve the enthusiastic participation of members throughout the summer and autumn. This will be published on a rolling basis, the first element of which is described below.

Richard Burge

Two important letters between Alun Michael and John Jackson - 18th April

From the Minister for Rural Affairs, Rt Hon Alun Michael MP, to John Jackson (Countryside Alliance)

**John Jackson Esq
Chairman
Countryside Alliance
367 Kennington Road
London
SE11 4PT**

10 April 2002

Dear John

HUNTING WITH DOGS

In a Statement to the House of Commons on Thursday 21 March, I set out the way in which I intend to proceed on the contentious issue of hunting with hounds in England and Wales. The full text of my statement is attached for ease of reference.

There was a firm manifesto commitment to allow a free vote on the issue and to "enable Parliament to reach a conclusion". We provided both Houses with an opportunity for debate on 18 and 19 March. It is now my task to put proposals before Parliament to help resolve the issue.

As well as setting out the principles on which I intend to base the legislative proposals. I said that over the next six months I would consult widely on practical issues of detail as well as working on the drafting of a Bill. As part of this process, I am writing to give you the full text of my undertaking to the House and to stress that I want to look for common ground wherever possible. The legislation must be practical and robust. so

shall welcome any contribution you wish to make.

As I indicated to the House, the two key principles to be addressed are the prevention of cruelty and the concept of utility. Cruelty is already dealt with in our legal system in regard to a variety of aspects other than hunting. "Utility" addresses the need for particular activities, particularly in the work of land and wildlife managers. It might be described as the need or usefulness of an activity for vermin control, wildlife management, habitat protection or land management and conservation.

If you have any comments or suggestions to help to establish the widest possible common ground, it would be helpful if you could let me know by Friday 26 April. Thank you for helping with this process.

Yours sincerely,

Alun Michael

John Jackson's reply to Alun Michael

"...You ask for comments or suggestions to help to establish the widest possible common ground". I will address that later in this letter but first I have to tell you that my Board, reflecting the views both of our membership and many others in the rural community, has grave doubts about the integrity of the process as such. The way in which ministers voted on 18 March (including in particular you and the Prime Minister), the partisan nature of Lord Whitty's remarks in the House of Lords on 19 March, your reference to the possible use of the Parliament Act, the exchange between you and Mr Kaufman in relation to the possible application of the Parliament Act to a bill howsoever amended in the House of Commons and Mr Kaufman's subsequent article in the Guardian have led to the belief that the Government's expression of neutrality is a sham and that it is in the process of letting its backbenchers take control of the situation into their own hands and, ultimately, impose their will. I am sorry to have to tell you this but facts are facts and we need to share knowledge of them.

I cannot emphasise strongly enough how deeply and widely extreme anger is felt within the rural community. Hunting with dogs has become a touchstone by which country people will judge the honesty and fairness of ministers in their approach to rural problems as a whole. They will not accept hunting as an issue which should be isolated and dealt with "on the side" in the light of party political expediency. The five events which I have described above have made a "Human Rights" march later this year a certainty: a date - 22 September - has been announced. That march will be a part of a sustained campaign throughout this summer and beyond designed to make clear the intensity of feelings on this matter. The Countryside Alliance has not created this problem. As you well know, first by campaigning for (and securing) an independent public inquiry and thereafter by making it clear, together with the hunting community as a whole, that in the light of the findings of that inquiry there was a willingness to pursue a way forward which would address the question of public confidence, the Alliance has played a responsible and constructive role. We are extremely disappointed by the turn which events took in the week beginning 18 March.

Having said the above, the Countryside Alliance will engage fully in the process of consultation and will encourage others to do so. We believe that the report of the Burns Committee already gives valuable indications of how to view the questions of cruelty and utility. We also believe that is reflected in the description of "utility" included in your letter. You know the importance the Alliance attaches to the whole process of consultation being as open and transparent as possible and that we support strongly the suggestion advanced by a number of peers that the process should include a joint committee of the two houses. We hope very much you will embrace that idea. In any event we will be taking steps ourselves to ensure that the facts, particularly as established by the Burns Committee, are widely known to the general public.

It is, of course, the hope of the Alliance that the consultative process will establish "the widest possible common ground" on which sensible proposals can be based but it is essential that you, as the Minister in charge, make it absolutely clear that this is part of a fair, genuine and honest process and that you will not surrender your control of it. Only in that way can confidence be restored.

Your letter to me and this reply are being communicated to the membership of the Alliance.

John Jackson, Chairman Countryside Alliance

Immediate Action - 10th May

It is now 7 weeks since the Government announced that it was going to hold a six month consultation period on hunting. So far interested parties have received a four paragraph letter from Alun Michael which did little to enhance confidence or move the process forward. Thus the consultation period only has four months left to run, one of which will be absorbed by the holiday period of August. As a result, with immediate effect, the Alliance Action Office will be putting in place a rolling programme of pickets at Prime Minister's Questions to be held every Wednesday between now and the end of the consultation period. We are setting up a rota programme manned by Hunts and allied groups in Westminster from Wednesday 15th May until further notice.

In addition we will put in place a persistent but targeted and movable vigil operation in Westminster to highlight that real jobs and livelihoods are at stake and that those taking part expect the Government to treat them and their cause fairly throughout the consultation process and beyond. The Government has promised to consult widely.

In the meantime whilst the Government makes up its mind what to do we cannot afford to wait any longer for an opportunity that might be

presented to us. The Countryside Alliance is therefore going to hold its own public forum at which the issues of 'cruelty' and 'utility' can be explained and debated in the presence of the media, experts on those two issues, and politicians. This forum will be timed to coincide with the end of the consultation process and will show the public the quality of evidence that has been submitted from a wide range of organisations across the board. The evidence will, we believe, show that there is no justification or need for banning hunting on any grounds, let alone the concepts of cruelty and utility as put forward by the Minister. More details on this event will follow.

There have been accusations that the Countryside Alliance is attempting to de-rail the Consultation. This is absolutely not true. We want a Consultation that is just, thorough, fair and open.

Legal Challenge Launched in Scotland - 14th May

On 13 February, the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill 2002 completed its final stage, Stage 3, in the Scottish Parliament. The Act is due to come into force on 1 August 2002. The Scottish Countryside Alliance is driving the legal challenge to the legislation. Under the terms of the Scotland Act 1998 the Scottish Parliament does not have the power to make laws that are not compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights. Indeed Acts of the Scottish Parliament are not law if they are contrary to the Convention. On 14 May 2002 a petition was lodged in Edinburgh's Outer Court of Session seeking judicial review and the striking down of this Act as being outside the Parliament's competence. The petitioners are individuals or groups who are directly affected by the Act including a landowner, a huntsman, an owner of hounds, a farmer and a hunt, thus representing the key classes of person whose rights are considered to be infringed under the European Convention of Human Rights. The first hearing will commence on 2 July and will last six days. While this is only the first stage we are fortunate to have been given an early date and a good number of days for the hearing which will allow for a full presentation of our case.

There is still everything to fight for in Scotland!

DEFRA Meeting - 13th June 2002

Alun Michael, the DEFRA Minister of State responsible for the hunting issue, today convened a meeting of representatives of the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals, the Countryside Alliance and the Middle Way Group. The CA delegation consisted of John Jackson, Chairman; Simon Hart, Director of Campaign for Hunting; Sam Butler, Chairman of Campaign for Hunting and Peter Daresbury on behalf of the Council of Hunting Associations. At the beginning of the meeting the CA, with the full backing of the Council of Hunting Associations, stated its stance in relation to hunting, which is set out below.

The meeting was constructive and is subject to an agreed press release: - "Joint statement by Alun Michael, Minister of State for Rural Affairs, and representatives of the Countryside Alliance, the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals and the Middle Way Group. Alun Michael, Minister of State for Rural Affairs, today met the three main umbrella groups concerned with the future of hunting. We have had a frank and constructive exchange of views. Each group started by setting out their key views on the issue. The division of opinion remain as clear as anyone who has been following this debate would expect. This has not been about removing those divisions, but about clarifying views. Open and frank discussion is even more important when views on an issue are sharply polarised and deeply held. The issue of hunting with dogs needs to be dealt with effectively, and the government wishes to proceed on the basis of as much common ground and agreement as possible and exploring issues which were not resolved by the Burns Inquiry.

Today's meeting has determined points of agreement on matters of definition and we have had constructive discussions about issues of cruelty and utility using the Burns Report as a starting point. The test of a democracy is the extent to which mature debate is possible on the most contentious issues of the day. There has been a good response to the initial letter to interested parties asking for views on the government's proposal to proceed on the key principles of cruelty and utility. On 31st May Alun Michael wrote again setting out a number of detailed questions on these points in the light of meetings and submissions so far. He invited the submission of specific evidence to support the views being expressed, including in particular evidence that has become available since the Burns Report was published. We have agreed today to try to arrange public hearings, probably to take place in September this year. These will explore the key issues in a focused way, drawing on expert evidence. This will help towards the drawing up of legislation based on clear principles, as indicated in Alun Michael's statement to the House of Commons on 21st March. Detailed discussions will continue towards that end."

Campaigning activity currently planned under the Summer of Discontent leading up to and beyond the March on 22nd September is still going ahead in earnest. Nothing changes!!

Sam Butler
Chairman, Campaign for Hunting

**Peter Daresbury
Council of Hunting Associations**

The Alliance Stance

The stance of the Countryside Alliance in relation to hunting is based on the following:-

- a) Personal liberty is an important component of any civilised society. But the Countryside Alliance has always recognised the force of the argument that for humans to behave towards animals whether domesticated, husbanded or wild, in a manner which is cruel is wrong, is an abuse of liberty, is contrary to the public interest and should be prohibited.**
- b) The definition of cruelty as the intentional infliction of unnecessary suffering has been used since 1911 and should be maintained. It is a test which is comparative and relative and is concerned with method.**
- c) A method of locating, pursuing, capturing or killing a wild animal which either inherently or because of the way in which it is done clearly inflicts more suffering than a practicable alternative method may well be classified as cruel. The Alliance accepts that, as a reasonable incursion into liberty, the application of a method which passes this "comparative" test (which on the basis of available evidence it believes properly conducted hunting does) must also be "useful".**
- d) The Alliance believes that the concept of utility must include social, economic, wildlife management, habitat and environmental considerations. The Alliance believes that in a manmade environment wildlife (and therefore the community as a whole) benefits from scientifically informed management and intervention.**
- e) In the view of the Alliance, it is wrong in principle for legislation to be limited in its application to particular species of mammals or particular methods of locating, pursuing, capturing or killing not least because it raises serious issues of discrimination. It should be framed so as to embrace conceptually all species of mammals and all circumstances.**
- f) Legislation needs to be framed in the overall context of social and economic needs, human relations with animals as well as wildlife and environmental management in a "crowded" island. This is a very complex matter and for enforceable legislation to command acceptance and confidence it should provide for the tests of utility and cruelty to be applied in whatsoever system on the basis of knowledgeably assessed evidence in the context of the particular circumstances. The application should encourage the development of and should use codes of conduct, best practice and self regulation.**