

# Cotswold Hunt Political Notes      July - Sept 2002

## Legal Challenge to Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act - 2nd July

The legal challenge to the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act began in the Outer Court of Session in Edinburgh on 2nd July and will continue for six days before a judge, Lord Nimmo Smith. The petitioners bringing the case (those who will be adversely affected by the Act) argue that the legislation represents an unjustifiable infringement of their human rights. Furthermore, as the Scottish Parliament cannot pass laws that are not compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, the Act is not in fact lawful. In passing the Act, the Scottish Parliament has acted beyond the powers given to it under the Scotland Act 1998, and as provided for in that Act such laws may be subject to judicial review. The court is being asked to strike down the legislation or at least prevent the Act coming into force on the 1st August until such time as the validity of the Act has been finally settled.

The first day of the hearing focused on a technical point about who should have been named as respondents to the petition. Counsel for the Advocate General, Dr Lynda Clark, QC, intimated to the Court that in his opinion the Advocate General ought not to have been convened as first respondent to the Petition. He argued that the correct respondent to the challenge is the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB). Paul Cullen QC, speaking on behalf of the petitioners, confirmed that they do not agree with that view. The Scotland Act is clear in its terms and the Advocate General is the correct first respondent. The Lord Advocate supported this view, as did the SPCB. Having heard the arguments the judge ruled that the Advocate General was indeed the correct respondent although he will give a full written Opinion in due course. Days two and three of the hearing were given over to the substantive arguments against the petition, made on behalf of the Lord Advocate by junior counsel. It will then be the turn of junior counsel for the petitioners to present their case after which senior counsel for both sides will address the court. The case continues.

## Further to the article 'Royal Show Buries Problems' - 3rd July

Richard Burge has submitted the following to The Times.

"The Times's report on the Royal Show encompasses but one sentence of my comments on this event. The countryside is still in the grip of the economic catastrophe caused by Foot and Mouth Disease, we are on the verge of critical decisions being made on the future of the Common

**Agricultural Policy for which the environment is being made very volatile by the American Farm Act and reversals caused by the French Election and we are in the final stages of the battle to ensure 200,000 country people are not made criminals simply because they hunt with dogs. The Liberty & Livelihood March on 22nd September is the place at which rural people will demand the Government achieves their consent before enacting policy. But the crucible within which that consensus has to be achieved is events like the Royal Show at Stoneleigh. The Royal Agricultural Society of England has a unique role to play; it is yet to rise to that occasion, and time is short for it to do so."**

### **Legal Challenge to the Hunting Act in Scotland - 11th July**

**The hearing in the Outer Court of Session concluded at lunchtime today having run for a day and a half longer than originally scheduled; the first day having been taken up with the question of whether the Advocate General was correctly named as a respondent to the petition. The remaining time was spent establishing the individual petitioners entitlement to sue, whether the various articles of the European Convention on Human Rights were in fact engaged and the remedies available to the court. The judge, Lord Nimmo Smith, is mindful of the Act's commencement date of 1st August and has indicated that he will issue a preliminary decision by the end of the month but will not have a full reasoned judgment prepared until a later date.**

### **Piccadilly Hunt ride through London - 11<sup>th</sup> July**

**The UCSW Piccadilly Hunt ride through London from Hyde Park to Westminster had a tremendous media response and was thoroughly enjoyed by those taking part. Over 70 horses were escorted through the streets, much to the amazement of the tourists - and the horses! The only casualty was one hunting supporter whose foot was chosen as a parking place by the RSPCA who had been asked along to look after the 'welfare of the horses'. Talk about adding injury to insult.**

### **THE NEXT TWO MONTHS - 18<sup>th</sup> July**

**Between now and the end of September there is a huge opportunity for us all. I want in this note to explain to you why. It is now certain that the process of consultation which the Government is running will include three days of hearings in September, in public and within the precincts of Parliament. These three days, which will be chaired by Alun Michael, the Minister responsible, will be centred on evidence to be given by experts on questions put to them. The starting point will be the Burns Inquiry. The questions to be addressed by those experts will relate to the areas of utility, cruelty and the practical aspects of any legislation based on utility and the need to avoid cruelty. The experts will be examined by us and others on their evidence. The proceedings will be available to the television channels, including BBC Parliament.**

**These three days will be extremely important and provide the means to present in public the case for hunting in all its forms and coursing and to bring out how much damage would be caused to the countryside if those activities were banned. The team we will field will need to be backed up by a smooth working (and unavoidably costly) infra-structure so that we are as well prepared as possible and get the most out of those days from every standpoint and particularly from a public relations standpoint. Richard Burge, Chief Executive of the Alliance, will apply his energies and experience to the provision and smooth operation of that infra-structure.**

**Access to the proceedings will be available to the public on a ticket basis and we will be given a ticket allocation. It is very important that we use the whole of our allocation and that throughout the country the proceedings are followed, and are seen to be followed, by friends and supporters gathered round TV sets which can pick up satellite or cable signals. Further information about that aspect will be given out in due course.**

**These public proceedings will take place on 9th, 10th and 11th September, i.e. two working weeks before the March on 22nd September. For this reason it is now even more important that the March is the largest that London has ever seen. It is also important that it is demonstrably a march by peaceful but determined people pressing for hunting and all rural matters to be dealt with fairly, without prejudice and on the evidence.**

**It is not possible to over emphasise the significance of the coming two months. We owe it to our countryside and each other to make the most of it and to do so in ways which attract warm public sympathy and support.**

**John Jackson - Chairman, Countryside Alliance**

## **'Public Hearings' Success Vindicates Campaign Strategy**

**We cannot underestimate the importance of the above announcement - it is, after all, what the CA Campaign for Hunting has been calling for since the consultation process began. We also should not be afraid to give credit to DEFRA for the openness of their approach on this issue.**

**While there is no place for complacency it is a clear indication that common sense could yet prevail and the perseverance and discipline, which at**

times we all find extremely hard to bear, now stands a chance of paying off.

This step is unprecedented in any previous Government consultation process. We are under no illusion about the perils of politics and we are taking nothing for granted but the Government cannot ignore the weight of our evidence and knows it must act transparently in finding a solution. That solution must reflect facts, not prejudices and ignorance.

Anything short of this will provoke a response never before seen in this country in modern times, as a significant minority rises up against the spin and deceit of ignorant and deeply intolerant politicians. The real test of our resolve will come should the Government unwisely try to introduce a Bill to ban, or allow the banning, of any form of legal hunting. We must, and will, remain alert for deceit and betrayal and will not rest until a fair future is found for the freedom to hunt.

We must continue to campaign throughout the country to show that we are ordinary decent people, that hunting has nothing to hide and that we can withstand the pressure as tension mounts towards the conclusion of this stage of the campaign.

We must keep our nerve, not be tempted by rash acts that feel good but fail to gain the public's confidence and trust. Developing public support must continue to be a priority over the coming months.

This announcement is a small step in the right direction; we all have our part to play in keeping up the pressure.

See you on the 22nd of September; the March will be the call to arms, a warning to Government to beware of acting unjustly against liberty and livelihood. Lets make it a date this country will always remember.

Sam Butler - Chairman, CA Campaign for Hunting

## **Scottish Bill (1st Round Court Judgment) - 31st July**

The court case in Scotland seeking judicial review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act was heard by Judge Lord Nimmo Smith. Today he has delivered a 122 page judgment on our case. What we sought at this first stage was a second hearing and interim relief to prevent the Act coming into force on the 1st August. The judge has granted neither a second hearing nor interim relief and has dismissed the petition.

Lord Nimmo Smith ruled firmly that the Scottish Parliament is subject to the courts and his judgment makes clear that he understands his decision will be appealed. His judgment appears to accept the submissions made on behalf of the Lord Advocate. The Judge was not persuaded that Article 8 (respect for private life) applied as mounted fox hunting with dogs is not an activity that falls within the concept of private life. The Judge accepted the application of Article 1 relating to property rights. We argued that the Protection of Wild Mammals Act interfered with the rights of a number of individual Petitioners. Lord Nimmo Smith however was not convinced that there would be loss of livelihood or homes as a result of the ban or that the hounds would have to be put down as a result of the Act. On Article 14 of the Convention (discrimination) the Judge accepted that it was engaged to a limited extent. Lord Nimmo Smith agreed that there had been discrimination against the Petitioners, but took the view that sufficient objective justification can be found for the discrimination between different forms of hunting. He accepted the Lord Advocate's argument that the Parliament was entitled to discriminate against mounted fox hunting with dogs. He was satisfied that while the Act does involve Convention rights, this interference with human rights can be justified. As such the Parliament was entitled to pass such legislation. The question of interim relief is a particular area of the decision, which will require close scrutiny by our legal team.

Over the next few days our legal team will be analysing the judgment although it is already clear that there are ample grounds on which to appeal. In order to appeal we do not need to seek leave of the Court. We have the right to appeal and the Appeal must be lodged within 21 days from 31 July 2002.

This result, while disappointing, is not unexpected and it must be remembered that this is only the first stage. There is a long way to go yet. The Alliance's legal team will now consider the extremely long and detailed judgment and establish the grounds for appeal. At appeal the case will go from the Outer Court of Session in Edinburgh to the Inner Court of Session and the Appeal will be heard before three judges. This case raises fundamental constitutional and human rights issues and the Alliance has always been very aware that the seriousness of the case may well mean that this goes all the way to European Court of Human Rights. The hunts in Scotland, have been aware for some months now of the position they now find themselves in on 1st August and are also aware that the service they provide to farmers and the wider local community must not be lost while this matter is in the courts. They have agreed to continue hunting within the terms of the legislation.

The Scottish hunts have said that: "A number of Scottish hunts intend to continue to offer a fox control service to our farmers and landowners using dogs and discussions have taken place with various police forces with this in mind. This will involve the use of guns, but will be well within the bounds of the law. We will continue this course of action in the belief that our legal appeal will be ultimately successful." They need the continued support of all those who are part of and support the hunt be they owners of land, subscribers or foot followers. More than ever before rural communities need to show complete solidarity and commitment in difficult times.

John Jackson - Chairman, Countryside Alliance

## **MFHA response in Scotland**

**Today's decision by Judge Lord Nimmo Smith to uphold the hunting ban in Scotland is clearly a big disappointment. However, it is only the first round in our legal battle against this illiberal and unjust Act of the Scottish Parliament. Already the Scottish Countryside Alliance has announced its intention to appeal against the Judge's decision. We are not surprised with the ruling made at this stage, believing that our case will be vindicated when subjected to more in depth appraisal as it proceeds through the courts. Pending a successful challenge against the Act, I urge people to remain calm and respect the law. A number of Scottish hunts intend to continue to offer a fox control service for farmers and discussions have already taken place with the various police forces as to how this can be conducted within the boundaries of the law. It will involve using hounds and guns, but there is nothing in the Act that says mounted followers cannot continue to support and watch hounds at work. We need the continued support of all those who are part of and support the hunts, be they owners of land, subscribers or foot followers. More than ever before rural communities need to show complete solidarity and commitment in these difficult times. Everyone's immediate response should be to register their intention to join the Liberty & Livelihood March on Sunday 22 September, by telephoning 0900 102 0900.**

**Joe Scott Plummer, MFHA representative in Scotland**

**PRESS RELEASE - Issued on behalf of the Scottish Countryside Alliance**

### **HUNT BAN CHALLENGERS PLAN APPEAL**

**The Scottish Countryside Alliance today (Wednesday, 31st July) announced its intention to appeal the decision by the Court of Session in Edinburgh to dismiss the legal challenge to the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act. Allan Murray, Director of the Scottish Countryside Alliance, said: "We are very disappointed but not surprised with the decision at this stage and are determined to fight it all the way. This legislation will shatter livelihoods and businesses in rural Scotland yet the court appears to have merely rubber-stamped the Act passed by the Scottish Parliament. Today's decision does not reflect the widespread concern over the quality or fairness of the legislation or the considerable damage it will do to the countryside. It is a great pity that those threatened by this legislation have not even been given the chance to tell the court in their own words how their lives will be affected. We believed our request for a second hearing was a very moderate one and are very disappointed it has been denied. We will strive to launch an appeal as soon as possible and will be discussing the details of that and today's decision with our legal team immediately. It is vital for us to seek an early appeal hearing because there are many people whose livelihoods are at risk and who, to this day, are still unclear as to what will be legal and what will be illegal under this Act. Some of the finest legal minds in Britain have been examining this legislation for months and doubt still remains over what may constitute an offence. The legislation will mean significant**

changes for the Scottish hunts and they will have to take stock of their activities, but they will operate within the law. It should be remembered, however, that various forms of hunting with dogs are still permitted under the terms of the Act. A number of Scottish hunts intend to continue to offer a fox control service for farmers and landowners and discussions have taken place with various police forces with this in mind. This would involve using guns and hounds and would be within the bounds of the law, but we still believe that an appeal against the Act will be ultimately successful."

Peter Watson, head of litigation at Levy & McRae, the solicitors advising the petitioners and the Scottish Countryside Alliance, said: "This case is not just about the right to hunt, it is about individual freedoms in the face of political correctness. It is about preserving the right of individual expression and personal freedoms. It is because of these fundamental issues that this case will be fought in every court until the right of the individual triumphs over political dogma."

## **DEFRA Public Hearings - 2nd August**

As you are by now aware DEFRA is holding three days of public hearings on the 9th, 10th and 11th September as part of the Government's consultation process on hunting. The first day will deal with the issue of utility, the second with the principle of least suffering and the third day with the application of principles. DEFRA is currently seeking experts to provide papers for discussion and debate in relation to subjects arising out of these headings.

We thought it would be helpful to summarise the arrangements that have been put in hand so that the necessary preparations for the hearings are complete and to manage our participation in the event itself.

We therefore have three principal tasks:

1. The assembly of information and arguments to be deployed by our team on the basis of the three lines of inquiry.
2. The management of media expectation and interest in the event. This will include the proposal to get a TV or audio feed onto the Alliance website so that people can follow the process via these means.
3. To prepare a front bench and support team for the three days of hearings.

To achieve these aims we have put together a special team of internal staff alongside some external consultants. The team will be led by Richard

**Burge, Chief Executive with Simon Hart, Director of the Campaign for Hunting, as his deputy. Georgina Kester will be responsible for managing the secretariat. Media management will be the responsibility of the Press Office with assistance from external consultants, with a special responsibility to ensure co-ordination with this event and the March which comes soon after the conclusion of the hearings. Richard Ovenstone will manage the website development and implementation.**

**We have set up three sub-groups to deal with each of the issues of utility, least suffering and implementation.**

**Finally, we will issue a fortnightly briefing so that as much information is put in the public domain as possible. In time this will include how the Alliance panel will be made up, the support team of experts and how the allocation of limited tickets will be implemented. At all stages we will be liaising closely with the Council of Hunting Associations so that all hunting disciplines are properly represented.**

## **Cotswold Councillors question the £10m cost of hunting ban with Minister - 15th August**

**The Chairman of Cotswold District Council, Councillor Tim Royle, has written to Minister for Rural Affairs Alun Michael, who is overseeing the consultation process on hunting with dogs, following a motion supported by an overwhelming majority of the Council. The letter points out that the annual expenditure generated by the five local hunts is over £10m, which is more than Cotswold Councils net budget. It also outlines the impact a hunting ban would have on local vets and farriers, as well as farmers who would have to find an alternative source of disposal for fallen stock. Councillor Royle also alerts the Minister to the wider effects a ban could have on isolated rural communities where hunts play a significant part in the social infrastructure. A wide range of activities from pony clubs providing structured recreation for young people to Point to Points, which have been the nurseries for so many successful local racehorses, are reliant on hunting.**

## **Hunting with Dogs: Hearings on the Evidence - 9th-11th September**

**Hunting Hearings - at the end of the first day**

**Our arguments on which the case for hunting stand are outlined below. The results of the hearings should be judged not on sound bites or media speculation but on the logical arguments which we will put to the hearings. These are the principles of our first day's argument on the principal of utility:**

**Ø Human beings have both a right and a duty to intervene in the management of wildlife, in what is a totally man-made countryside with no wilderness left.**

**Ø Wildlife management in a man-made environment involves the maintenance, by all available means, of animal populations at levels which can be tolerated by human communities. Hunting is an effective and flexible means of achieving this, and thus can only be addressed meaningfully in the context of other aspects of wildlife management as a whole.**

**Ø It is the overwhelming view of land-owners, land-management professionals and farmers that unmanaged populations of fox, deer, mink and hare significantly compromise the balance of sustainable land use and bio-diversity, causing damage and financial loss. These species must therefore be controlled (or in the case of mink, which is an alien species, eradicated). This also holds true for every other wild mammal, for instance rats and rabbits.**

**Ø Wildlife populations, including the 4 quarry species hunted in the UK, cannot maintain themselves at population levels tolerable to human communities, especially given the absence of their historic predators and an unnaturally abundant availability of food provided by increasing human habitation.**

**Ø The vast majority of those involved professionally with land and wildlife management support the use of hunting. Is it wise to prohibit an activity deemed legitimate and beneficial by those who have the most practical expertise and on-the-ground knowledge of the facts on the issue?**

**Ø Communities within which hunting takes place derive economic and social benefit from the activity. These are both important components of the concept of utility because they contribute both to sustainable development and social capital.**

**Ø In those parts of the country where coursing and beagling take place hare populations are thriving, due to the higher tolerance of hare damage amongst the rural communities concerned and also because landowners commonly engage in hare habitat improvement. By contrast, where illegal hare hunting takes place rural communities are being forced to eliminate hare habitat as precautionary move to reduce the threat of violent trespass and intimidation which is a common feature of illegal hunting.**

**The session was opened by Lord Burns who set the scene for the rest of the day. We are currently analysing the transcripts of today's proceedings. An in-depth analysis will follow as soon as we have finished drafting it. Outlined below is a brief summary of our initial reaction.**

- "Lord Burns made quite clear this morning that in his view the only chance of a workable solution from the Government is one that "carries the people with it. Trying for a quick solution would not really be a solution at all."
- "We have long called for a fully transparent consultation process and welcome these 3 days of hearings - the first part of which has already demonstrated just how complex the issue is"
- "In a hearing meant to focus on evidence, the most common phrase we have heard throughout the day has been that "there is no evidence"
- "Curiously, today has already shown that the anti-hunting case is all too often based on a lack of evidence, rather than the reverse. It is customary for scientists to back up their case with evidence. To do otherwise would be merely scientific prejudice".
- "Even the evidence discussed at this early stage in the hearings shows how many gaps remain in the scientific knowledge about hunting. So how can politicians seriously think of criminalising a tried and tested rural practice, given such continuing information deficit".
- "The proceedings today have shown that the anti-hunting movement is guilty of 'eco imperialistic tendencies' in dismissing the role of local communities in deciding how their own environment and wildlife should be managed. Their comments suggest that their main basis for dismissing the views and practices of local communities regarding hunting is that they do not like them".
- "The anti-hunting lobby never mention people or communities. It is as if the Rio Declaration and the events at Johannesburg happened on another planet. Local livelihood, community and culture - people - are objects on which to impose political ends. This is not acceptable in the developing world. It is not acceptable here. It would be the imposition of policy without the consent of those most affected and disadvantaged by that policy."

Richard Burge, Chief Executive - Countryside Alliance

## Hunting Hearings - at the end of the second day

Release: 5pm

Date: 10 September 2002

First Reaction Of Countryside Alliance Chief Executive, Richard Burge

**"Yesterday we clearly established the need for effective management of wildlife by local communities in the countryside. Within this, hunting brings valuable practical, social and economic benefits.**

**"Today, we established that the prohibition of hunting will be likely to increase rather than decrease suffering to wild animal populations, and would definitely cause irreversible damage to the social and cultural fabric of the countryside.**

**"Scientists were obliged to speculate and make assumptions without the backing of scientific data. No consistent ethic for dealing with wild animals was established. No one body could agree on what constituted suffering. In particular it was found that:**

- 1. Suffering is always involved in the natural deaths animals meet in the wild, which are often lingering and painful.**
- 2. The Burns Inquiry found that death from hunting is virtually instantaneous, unlike alternative forms of control, which are not. No evidence has been presented to show that other methods are preferable to hunting from any animal welfare point of view.**
- 3. Wild mammals such as foxes, mink, hare and deer are equipped by natural selection for the chase, and are not equipped for life and death as domestic animals. Hunting most closely resembles the chase from wild predators. The closer we get to the natural situation for which an animal is equipped, the less suffering we cause.**
- 4. Behavioural studies of animals strongly suggest that animals appear to suffer stress when placed in situations to which they have no response. It is clear that hunting is a situation to which they have responses.**

**"It is also very clear from the morning's hearings that there is no agreement on the definition of awareness or suffering in animals, nor on the moral or ethical principles involved. Without this, we have no sound basis on which to define cruelty, or to further the welfare of our wild animal populations.**

**"After two days, it is becoming evident that those people who think there must be a quick and easy solution to this issue are mistaken. It is perfectly clear that hunting plays an important part in the effective management of the countryside. It is equally clear that there is no agreement anywhere on what constitutes cruelty. "**

**Richard Burge, Chief Executive - Countryside Alliance**

## **Hunting Hearings - at the end of the third day**

**Release: 6pm, 11th September**

### **Final Day Comments: Working for a Fair Solution**

- The Countryside Alliance has fully participated in the three-day open consultation on Hunting chaired by Alun Michael.**
- On the first day, it has been clearly established that there is a need for effective management of wildlife by local communities in the countryside. Within this, it was demonstrated that hunting brings valuable practical, social and economic benefits.**
- On the second day, the hearings considered cruelty and the principle of least suffering. We are pleased that the experts concluded there is no reason to apply different tests to different wild mammals - it is the same for the field mouse as it is for the deer. Hunting has never been afraid of being tested against these principles of cruelty and that remains its position. At the end of these sessions the clear consensus was that there should be a common approach to all animal welfare.**
- Today, the debate focusing on applying the principles of utility and least suffering has been interesting and constructive and reflects the complexity of the issues. It has also reinforced Lord Burns' comments on Monday that any solution acceptable to the majority must be developed over time.**
- Richard Burge, Chief Executive, the Countryside Alliance, said:  
"This valuable process has shown that there is no evidence either on utility or cruelty grounds for any kind of ban on hunting - although there may well be a case for some form of independent regulation. The burden of proof must be on those who would take away others liberties and no proof has been forthcoming. Hunting has already proved its case in the communities where it takes place or it would not continue to thrive".**
- John Jackson, Chairman of the Countryside Alliance, said:  
"These hearings have been an important step towards helping the Minister to come to a conclusion and make fair and logical proposals to Parliament. We agree with the Minister that a solution will have to involve some sort of legislation. This legislation must be workable, stand the test of time and be acceptable to the communities who are going to be affected".**

**"Looking forward, we have a hugely important Liberty & Livelihood March for the Countryside on 22 September. It is not an anti-government march. It is a pro countryside march, which gives rural people, and those interested in the future of the countryside, an opportunity to impress on our politicians that they have real issues, which must be addressed with reference to the facts. I am certain that the great majority of people on that March would wish Alun Michael the best of luck in finding a solution."**

## **Thoughts following the three days**

**On Wednesday we finished the three days of meetings about hunting in Portcullis House. These were part of the consultation process by Alun Michael, Minister for Rural Affairs. That process is now nearing its end.**

**There is no doubt that we were right to take part in those meetings. Although the opponents of hunting had an opportunity to air their views in public - again - the hunting community had a full opportunity, with the help of experts, to present openly and publicly the case for all forms of hunting and to explain the many benefits that flow from them. We did well and great emphasis was placed on those benefits which relate to the management of wild life and the sense of community which has always been such an important part of our countryside.**

**Alun Michael has promised in his public statements that his proposals will be based on principle and the evidence and that he will seek a lasting solution. On the basis of what has emerged, he should propose, after some time for reflection, that the law on cruelty to all wild mammals, which is presently in a dreadful state, is put on a proper and consistent basis. He should also propose that tests of utility be applied in a sensible and practical way and reflect the right of local communities to be involved in the management of their own environment in the light of their local circumstances. If the proposals are on these lines then we can all look forward to the "end of the beginning" of a new era for hunting. That era will be characterised by openness, accountability and increasing confidence by the public in the way in which the activity is conducted.**

**If the proposals do not flow from the evidence and are unfair or are drafted so that they can be turned into something which is unfair, there is no doubt that the countryside will and should erupt in fury. We should not expect that to happen. Whilst it is important that the March on 22nd September is huge and emphasises that the rural community expects all matters which are very important to it to be dealt with fairly and on the facts, we should leave no doubt in Alun Michael's mind that if his proposals are fair, he will enjoy great goodwill.**

**John Jackson, Chairman - Countryside Alliance**

## **Countryside Alliance Chief Executive Richard Burge comments on media coverage of the Hunting Hearings, the build up to the March, and the resolve of the Alliance - 15th September**

"The spinning has started. Over the weekend it has been about the hearings on evidence concerning hunting with dogs. It has started about the March on the 22 September. In truth, this spin in our media and from "pundits" is simply opinion masquerading as fact; it is ill-formed conjecture and speculation; it is single sentences being taken out of hour-long interviews in order to distort the intent of the speaker.

So let's get a few things straight; about the hearings, about the March, and about the resolve of the Countryside Alliance.

The hearings in Portcullis House were very revealing. No evidence was produced to justify a ban on hunting with dogs in any way. No evidence has been produced which showed it was cruel; indeed rather a lot of evidence was produced to show it was at least as humane as any other method for managing our wildlife. The hearings clearly showed that the social and cultural aspects of hunting are vital to our rural communities and are completely irreplaceable. We have a statutory obligation under the EU Habitat Directive, and the Rio Declaration, to preserve the way of life of rural people as part of sustainable development. It is written, as John Jackson said, in letters of fire across the declarations in Johannesburg a few weeks ago.

The March is by the countryside and about the countryside. Hunting is obviously a crucial issue to those who hunt, and the communities that rely on them and support them. There are other issues, which are far more important to rural people. Issues about our livelihoods, our jobs, our communities, our young people, which figure in the massive and justifiable anger of the countryside. Ultimately, the March is about allowing us to live our lives responsibly in the way we choose. It is about protecting us from prejudice and bigotry, especially at this moment against hunting with dogs. It is about requiring our consent - the countryside is a place you do things for, not to. It is about the need for Parliament to deal with our real problems that threatened our economy, our communities and the future of our children.

The March will be peaceful but forceful and determined. I have absolute confidence that between ourselves and the Police (with whom we have full co-operation), nobody who has mischief at their heart will get inside the M25 on Sunday.

For the March hunting is hugely important in its own right, but far more important as a symbol of our much deeper sense of concern and fear for rural liberty and tolerance of difference.

Finally, the resolution of the Alliance. We are totally committed to winning this battle. We do not count the odds, we are simply determined to win. In private and in public the message to Government and Parliament has been the same. We want to secure a viable and fair future for hunting and through that a security for all field sports as a unique and valued contributor to the stewardship and culture of our countryside.

**But the greatest price is to ensure that never again will rural Britain have to plead for the common freedoms and right to livelihood that we as a nation rightly defend vigorously abroad."**

**Richard Burge - Chief Executive, Countryside Alliance**

## **23rd September**

**Yesterday we made history. The countryside spoke with 407,791 voices. Everyone must be so proud to have been a part of the day that MUST make a difference - politicians must understand that they ignore us at their peril. It is now Parliament's responsibility to translate an historic march into a just and evidence based decision for Hunting, and to recognise the other concerns of an undervalued community.**

**Thank you to everybody who played a part in creating such a memorable and powerful day. It was a job seriously well done. While the countryside went to London reverberations of our protest were felt across the country - even on the Richter scale!**

## **27th September**

**Yesterday, the number of those who registered to March in Spirit was 102,565 which takes the number supporting the March well over the magic Half Million mark. Well Done.**

**The Countryside Alliance will have a stand inside the Labour Party Conference at Blackpool this weekend - the back drop of which will be a huge photo of last Sunday's March reminding delegates who we are and our reasons for marching. There will not be a large presence outside the Conference for the following reason.**

**The sheer size of the March, its peacefulness combined with the strength of feeling will bring us great political gain, and not only in the short term. All the media picked up on the point that our fight is for people and communities and John Jackson has made it very clear that the hunting issue**

**has become the touchstone for a fair deal for the countryside. If the Government deals fairly with hunting - and on the evidence - then that will engender goodwill. If it does not it will be taken as an indication that the Government has a prejudiced attitude which will engender suspicion and hatred in the countryside.**

**The Government constantly uses the hunting issue as a political football and as a pawn in the ugly world of politics to draw attention away from a number of serious problems. The PM will have to square these serious problems with his Party at Blackpool.**

**It would be a grave mistake to engage in any activity that would encourage the PM to agree with his backbenchers that the hunting community is selfish, and unreasonable and should therefore be dealt with accordingly.**