

Call for Evidence on Phasing Out the Use of Cages in the Gamebird and Quail Sectors

April 2024

Call for Evidence – Phasing out the use of cages in the gamebird and quail sectors

The species covered by this call for evidence are pheasants, partridges and quail, either home-bred or imported, and reared under farm conditions, whether or not for subsequent release.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving animal welfare and announced a Programme for Government Commitment for 2023/2024 to consult on the phasing out of cages for gamebirds.

Before consulting more widely on specific proposals, the Scottish Government seeks to expand its understanding of the gamebird industry and has taken the opportunity to include quail egg and meat production in Scotland, especially the extent to which cages are used for housing egg-laying and meat birds. We would like to hear the views of stakeholders on how these systems can be improved to enhance the welfare of the birds kept in them.

We invite anyone involved in the sector to contribute to this Call for Evidence in order to help us frame a future consultation in such a way that it asks the right questions and elicits responses to guide future actions that continue to support this important sector while enhancing animal welfare.

Context

Approximately 40 million gamebirds (30 to 35 million pheasants and 5 to 10 million partridges) are estimated to be released each year in Great Britain for shooting. Scottish figures held for the quail sector state that there are approximately 22,000 quail in Scotland.

Gamebirds reared for sporting purposes are not regarded as farmed animals for the purposes of farm animal welfare legislation as they are bred and reared primarily for sport shooting. This means that gamebirds bred and reared for sporting purposes are not subject to the same legislative requirements on welfare as farmed poultry.

However, gamebirds bred and reared under controlled conditions for the purpose of release for sport shooting, together with birds retained or caught-up for breeding purposes are protected animals for the purposes of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. Those responsible for their care may be committing an offence should they fail to take reasonable steps to ensure the needs of the animal are met whilst still in their care.

Farmed gamebirds are bred on farms in Great Britain or are imported to Great Britain, mostly from Europe, as hatching eggs, with a lesser number as day-old chicks from France. About half the pheasants and up to 90% of partridges imported are reared for the UK sporting sector.

Gamebirds are reared intensively on the farm, or more extensively on the shoot, before being released to the wild for shooting when the season begins. In the release pens and after release, there may be some ongoing support in the form of feed, water or shelter. We understand that around 1000 quail are kept in cages for egg and meat production in Scotland¹.

Gamebirds have traditionally been bred and reared using simple systems of husbandry, though increasingly more intensive methods have been used. Over the years Codes of Practice have been issued by various bodies representing game keepers and shooting interests.

The Scottish Government and the other devolved administrations introduced the gamebird welfare codes in collaboration with interested stakeholders in 2011 –

[\(Gamebirds: Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes \(www.gov.scot\)\)](http://www.gov.scot)

Currently, Gamebird keepers with 50 birds or more are required to be listed on the British Poultry Register. Voluntary registration of premises keeping less than 50 birds is encouraged, allowing administrations to locate poultry premises accurately and to warn keepers of health and restriction problems associated with notifiable diseases through the current alert system. The use of the Poultry Register has subsequently been extended to other animal health and welfare purposes, including planning of visits related to legislation on veterinary medicines and animal welfare. The soon to be introduced Scottish Poultry Register will replace the British Poultry Register in Scotland, adopting all of the current functions from its predecessor.

We would be interested to hear the sector's views on the difference between the enriched cages used for laying hens which provide a separate laying area, perching and provision for scratching mats² and the cages used for gamebirds and quail and how the following recommendations in the code of practice for the welfare of gamebirds reared for sporting purposes are met in practice:-

6.1 When birds are housed or penned, the accommodation should be well constructed and managed and of sufficient size to ensure good health and welfare.

This is best achieved by:

- a) good design, including adequate facilities for the inspection of the birds, and their removal where necessary;
.... and
- c) appropriate size, stocking densities and facilities, including appropriate environment enrichment, to ensure good health and welfare;

¹ Source: GB Poultry Register

² [Guidance for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

and in particular,

6.11 Barren raised cages for breeding pheasants and small barren cages for breeding partridges should not be used. All laying systems used for the housing of birds should be designed and managed to ensure the welfare of the birds. Any system should be appropriately enriched.

As a general indication, we would consider cages as including any raised enclosures with artificial flooring and/or any that significantly restrict the birds' freedom of movement or natural behaviours like foraging and dust bathing.

Audience

Anyone may respond to the call for evidence. Those who have an interest include:

- Gamebird breeders and rearers
- The veterinary profession
- Animal welfare organisations
- Animal welfare inspection and enforcement bodies
- Gamebird and shooting associations
- Farming unions
- The scientific community

Responding to this call for evidence

10. This call for evidence starts on 22 April 2024 and closes on 12 July 2024.

Please respond to this call for evidence using the Scottish Government's consultation hub: "Citizen Space". You can access and provide your evidence at:

<https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-economy/call-for-evidence-gamebird-and-quail-sector>

You can save and return to your response while the consultation remains open. **However, please ensure that your evidence is submitted via Citizen Space before the closing date of 12 July 2024.**

If you are unable to submit your response through our consultation hub, then please submit it along with a completed Respondent Information Form (which has been published alongside this consultation paper) to:

Gamebird and Quail Welfare – Call for Evidence
Animal Welfare Team
The Scottish Government
P Spur
Saughton House
Broomhouse Drive
EH11 3XD

Please do try to reply using the Citizen Space hub as it makes administration of consultations considerably easier.

We appreciate that many respondents will only have an interest in one particular part of this Call for Evidence and may therefore only wish to respond to the section of relevance. Where this is the case, you should complete the section of interest using Citizen Space or, alternatively, complete the consultation questionnaire and return it to the address above along with the Respondent Information Form.

Please try to answer all the questions; however, if you are unable to answer any particular question then please feel free to move on to the next. Please note that you will be asked to explain the reasons for your answer as appropriate in the spaces provided in the questionnaire on Citizen Space.

When answering the consultation questions, we ask that you take into consideration the information provided in this document alongside your own relevant knowledge or personal experience. All opinions are welcome.

How to make an enquiry about this Call for Evidence

If you have any queries about this consultation please contact the Scottish Government's Animal Welfare Team at: AnimalHealthWelfare@gov.scot

Handling your response

If you respond using Citizen Space, you will be directed to the About You page before submitting your response. Please indicate on the Respondee Information Form how you wish your response to be handled and, in particular, whether you are happy for your response to be published. If you ask for your response not to be published, we will regard it as confidential, and we will treat it accordingly.

All respondents should be aware that the Scottish Government is subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and would therefore have to consider any request made to it under the Act for information relating to responses made to this consultation exercise.

To find out how we handle your personal data, please see our [Privacy Policy](#)

Next steps in the process

Where respondents have given permission for their response to be made public, and after we have checked that they contain no potentially defamatory material, responses will be made publicly available at [Scottish Government Consultations](#). If you use Citizen Space to respond, you will receive a copy of your response via email.

When the call for evidence closes all responses will be analysed and considered along with any other available evidence to help us decide on whether to progress our proposals and if so, how to do so in a way that ensures the sustainability of the sector and the welfare of birds. **Responses will be published where permission to do so has been given.**

A call for evidence summary report will also be published that will include an anonymised analysis of the responses received and set out the next steps.

Scottish Government consultation process

Consultation is an essential part of the policy making process. It gives you the opportunity to have your say on what we do or propose to do and it gives us valuable insight, perspective, and evidence that in turn informs and shapes what we do.

All Scottish Government consultations and calls for evidence are available online and can be found at: [Scottish Government Consultations](#).

Evidence responses received are analysed and used as part of the decision making process, along with a range of other available information and evidence. We publish a report for every consultation/call for evidence we undertake. Depending on the nature of the consultation undertaken, the responses received may:

- indicate the need for policy development or review,
- inform the development of a particular policy,
- help decisions to be made between alternative policy proposals,
- be used to finalise legislation before it is implemented.

While the details of individual circumstances described in a response to a consultation may usefully inform the policy process, public consultations cannot address individual concerns and comments, which should be directed to the relevant body as appropriate.

This call for evidence is in line with the Scottish Government's Consultation Principles. **Please note that a period of 12 weeks applies for evidence to be submitted.**

More information and consultation guidance can be found at:

[Consultations in the Scottish Government: guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Section 1 - You and Your Business

Q1. a) Please select from the following options that which best describes your reason for taking part in this consultation (Please select all relevant options).

Gamebird and Quail sectors:

- Breeder
- Pullet rearer
- Quail Egg producer
- Quail Meat producer
- Gamebird egg producer
- Trade body
- Other

If selecting "Other" - please specify your reason for taking part in this consultation [i.e. keeper of laying hens, consumer, veterinary advisor]:

Q1. b) If you answered yes to the previous question, please specify the species and number of gamebird(s)/quail you breed and/or rear?

Q2. Size of business –

a) Area of land/buildings used for gamebird or quail enterprise?

Hectares =

Building m² =

b) If you release gamebirds, what number of each species do you release each season?

c) If you source gamebirds or quail (including hatching eggs), do you source them from the UK or do you import them from another country?

If yes, please select:

* UK suppliers / EU suppliers / Both / Other (please specify)

i. What species do you source? / How many birds do you source per year? / What is the value of this?

ii. Do you source as eggs, day old chicks or young birds (8 weeks)? Please select:

- Eggs
- Day old chicks
- Young birds (8 weeks)

ii. If you import, please indicate which country you import from.

iii. If you import, are you aware of the accommodation used for breeding birds in the premises of origin? Please specify for each species you import.

Section 2 – Management Practices

Q1. So we are able to better understand the production methods used across the sectors in Scotland. Please list the production methods you use for each species during breeding, rearing, egg and meat production (if applicable).

Q2. Please specify the design and size of the accommodation used for each species kept during the periods below and there is any provision of enrichment used?. We would also welcome images of the accommodation, if available, which can be emailed to: AnimalHealthWelfare@gov.scot

- a) During breeding
- b) During rearing
- c) During overwintering
- d) Egg production
- e) Meat production

i. Is enrichment provided? If so, what type of enrichment is most useful and do you have evidence to show how it is beneficial?

- a) During breeding
- b) During rearing
- c) During overwintering
- d) Egg production
- e) Meat production

Q3. Can you provide information on litter management, how much and what type is used? How often is the litter changed and what triggers this change?

Q4. What do you consider are the advantages and disadvantages of breeding gamebirds and quail egg and meat production in pens? Please also specify which species and the type of pen you are referring to.

Q5. If you keep partridges, how many seasons are the breeding pairs kept together?

Q6. Do you use any of the management practices described in the Codes of Practice (e.g. bits / spectacles / hoods / brailles)? If so, please specify;

i. Which you use for each species, why they are used and for how long?

- a) During breeding
- b) During rearing
- c) Egg production
- d) Meat production

ii. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these management practices?

iii. What other practices/methods do you use that are not included in the Codes of Practice but you consider should be?

Q7. If you breed or rear gamebirds and quail for egg and meat production, what hygiene and biosecurity practices do you implement to control or limit disease? Please specify for all.

i. Please provide details of your current hygiene and biosecurity regime.

ii. Where do you get health/biosecurity advice from?

iii. Do you have any contingency plans in place?

Section 3 - Considerations for the Future

To assist with formulating a future consultation on phasing out the use of cages for gamebirds and quail we would be like to hear your views and thoughts on the following:-

- Q1. What are the most important considerations for improving gamebird welfare when breeding and rearing? Please indicate if your priority areas are species-specific.
- Q2. What impact would the following changes have on your business? Please specify the additional cost per bird if known.
- a) Transitioning away from cages.
 - b) Limiting certain management practices.
 - c) The addition of further enrichment of cages
 - d) Increasing the minimum area per bird
- Q3. Do you think there should be a maximum time limit for gamebirds and quail to be kept in cages, and if so, what would you recommend? Please specify whether this recommendation is based on research or personal experience.
- Q4. What do you consider to be a sufficient size of cage to ensure good health and welfare? Please specify the species you are referring to.
- Q5. What other factors should be considered and addressed to improve the welfare of gamebirds and quail?
- Q6. Do you have any plans to alter your current production method and practices in the next 5 to 10 years?
- Q7. Are you aware of any other methods or practices used in Scotland for the breeding and rearing of gamebirds and for quail egg and meat production? If, yes what are they and what are your views on them?

About you

Please indicate how you wish your response to be handled and, in particular, whether you are content for your response to be published. If you ask for your response not to be published, we will still take account of your views in our analysis but we will not publish your response, quote anything that you have said or list your name. We will regard your response as confidential, and we will treat it accordingly. To find out how we handle your personal data, please see our [privacy policy](#). By clicking submit you agree to our privacy policy.

Q1. What is your name?

Q2. What is your email address?

Q3. Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Q4. If not as an individual, what is your organisation?

Q5. Further information about your organisation response (optional)

Q6. The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

(Required)

Please select only one item

- Publish response with name
- Publish response only (without name)
- Do not publish response

Information for organisations only:

The option 'Publish response only (without name)' refers only to your name, not your organisation's name. If this option is selected, the organisation name will still be published.

If you choose the option 'Do not publish response', your organisation name may still be listed as having responded to the consultation in, for example, the analysis report.

Q7. We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

(Required)

- Yes
- No

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.



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