



The British Shooting Sports Council



ANNUAL REPORT

2020

BRITISH SHOOTING SPORTS COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

Contents

	Page
Foreword	2
The Council's Officers	3
Association Representatives	4
Abbreviations used in the text	5
Overview of the year	6
Antique Firearms	6
British Shooting Sports Council meetings	6
Coronavirus: firearms licensing	8
Coronavirus: reopening of ranges and shooting grounds	8
European Firearms Pass	9
FACE	9
Firearms and Explosives Licensing Stakeholder meeting	9
Firearms Prevent Board	10
Firearms Safety consultation	10
Firearms Security Handbook	11
Lead in Ammunition	11
Licensing of game bird release	12
Media Training	12
Offensive Weapons Act	13
Practitioners Group	13
Statutory Guidance to Chief Officers of police	13
Trophy Hunting	14
Value of Shooting survey	14
World Forum on Shooting Activities	15

Cover picture: A Kaiserstutzen rifle by Wertgarner, Enns c.1900/14 in Männlicher Schönauer 8 x 56mm, one of the 23 cartridge designations newly listed as obsolete. Believed formerly owned by Earl Edmund Attems, Governor of Styria.

Courtesy of Derek Stimpson

FOREWORD

No amount of planning could have prepared us for the year that was 2020. A programme of activity which expected to deal with outstanding licensing issues and to address the fast-approaching consequences of Britain's departure from the European Union was, within weeks, overtaken by a public health emergency which engulfed the world.

The pandemic of course brought tragedy to many thousands of families, but in a strange way, it also brought out the best in people. Within the shooting world, sporting estates, shooting grounds and clubs battled to make the best of a potentially disastrous year. The public sector bodies with which BSSC works – police and civil servants in a range of Government departments – did their best to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions brought about by the Covid-19 restrictions imposed by Government. They ensured that essential licensing work continued and they remained in constant contact with our national associations, enabling shooting sports to emerge in good heart as soon as was possible after lockdown. I would like to thank them for their efforts during a very difficult period.

Many of us meanwhile learned new and unfamiliar technical skills, as videoconferencing replaced conventional meetings, enabling people to 'gather' together in virtual groups quickly and easily without having to rely on cars, trains or aeroplanes. I am sure that videoconferencing has become a firm fixture in our lives, though as I write this, we look forward with great anticipation to the chance to meet again in person.

But many of the issues that faced us at the start of 2020 have still to be resolved. Statutory guidance on firearms licensing procedure is not yet finalised and even when it is, it will take time to bed in. The aftermath of Brexit is still resulting in unforeseen difficulties for the gun trade, and the decision by the live quarry associations to move away from lead ammunition will present challenges for all shooting sports. I am confident that we will rise to those challenges.



Jonathan Djanogly MP

Chairman

THE COUNCIL'S OFFICERS

PRESIDENT	The Lord Robathan PC
VICE-PRESIDENT	Martyn Jones
CHAIRMAN	Jonathan Djanogly MP
VICE-CHAIRMAN	Martyn Jones, Derek Stimpson
TREASURER	Bill Harriman
SECRETARY	Graham Downing

“The aims and objectives of the Council are to promote and safeguard the lawful use of firearms and air weapons for sporting and recreational purposes in the United Kingdom amongst all sections of the community.”

(Extract from the Constitution of the Council)

ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES

ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL SHOOTING INSTRUCTORS	Chris Miles
BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR SHOOTING AND CONSERVATION	Bill Harriman TD
COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE	Sam Carlisle
CLAY PIGEON SHOOTING ASSOCIATION	Iain Parker
DEACTIVATED WEAPONS ASSOCIATION	Barry Johnson
FIFTY CALIBRE SHOOTERS' ASSOCIATION	Scott Wylie
GUN TRADE ASSOCIATION	Simon West
HISTORICAL BREECHLOADING SMALLARMS ASSOCIATION	Derek Stimpson
INSTITUTE OF CLAY SHOOTING INSTRUCTORS	Malcolm Plant
MUZZLE LOADERS' ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN	Jon Harper-Smith
NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION	Andrew Mercer
NATIONAL SMALLBORE RIFLE ASSOCIATION	Graham Burns
PREPARATORY SCHOOLS RIFLE ASSOCIATION	Mary Eveleigh
SPORTSMAN'S ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND	Savvas Toufexis
UNITED KINGDOM PRACTICAL SHOOTING ASSOCIATION	Alex Moreton
VINTAGE ARMS ASSOCIATION	Ian Barclay
CO-OPTED MEMBERS	Jim McAllister David Penn
HONORARY LEGAL ADVISER	Mark Scoggins

ABBREVIATIONS

BASC:	British Association for Shooting and Conservation
BMA:	British Medical Association
CPSA:	Clay Pigeon Shooting Association
CA:	Countryside Alliance
CUF:	Criminal Use of Firearms
DCC:	Deputy Chief Constable
DCMS:	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
DEFRA:	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
ECHA:	European Chemicals Agency
EFP:	European Firearms Pass
ENVI:	European Environment Directorate General
EU:	European Union
FAC:	Firearm Certificate
FACE:	European Federation of Associations for Hunting & Conservation
FELWG:	NPCC's Firearms and Explosives Licensing Working Group
GP:	General Practitioner
GTA:	Gun Trade Association
HME:	High Muzzle Energy
ICSI:	Institute of Clay Shooting Instructors
IWA:	Internationale Waffen Ausstellung (International Firearms Exhibition)
MARS:	Manually Actuated Release System
MoD:	Ministry of Defence
NaBIS:	National Ballistics Intelligence Service
NCA:	National Crime Agency
NFLMS:	National Firearms Licensing Management System
NPCC:	National Police Chiefs' Council
PSRA:	Preparatory Schools Rifle Association
RCGP:	Royal College of General Practitioners
REACH:	EU Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals
TNIAG:	Themed National Independent Advisory Group
UN:	United Nations
WFSA:	World Forum on Shooting Activities

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Overview of the year

As with every other branch of human endeavour, shooting sports were sorely affected by the Coronavirus pandemic which arrived in Britain in the early months of 2020 and which resulted in a series of national lockdowns. All formal competition shooting was cancelled from March onwards and throughout the summer, with both indoor and outdoor ranges and shooting grounds closed for much of the year and with the scheduled Tokyo Olympic Games postponed for 12 months. While a relaxation of the Coronavirus regulations allowed a limited return to outdoor target and game shooting during the autumn, the game shooting season saw a substantial downturn, with activity reduced by some 40%. A second peak of Coronavirus in late autumn foreshadowed a third lockdown which took effect from the end of the Christmas holiday and lasted long into 2021, bringing with it a complete cessation of all sporting shooting. All BSSC meetings from February onwards were held online by videoconferencing and the Annual Luncheon had to be cancelled at short notice. Meanwhile the cessation of all international travel saw the cancellation of the IWA trade fair and all FACE and World Forum activity moved to online videoconferencing platforms. Brexit, which had dominated the political scene for three years, was pushed almost to the margins of public life, although the final departure of the UK from the EU was to have immediate and lasting effect upon international trade in firearms and unforeseen consequences upon the movement of sporting firearms and even Gundogs between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Antique firearms

In November, the Government published a Statutory Instrument designed to define in law an 'antique firearm' by reference to the cartridge for which it was chambered, its propulsion system and its date of manufacture, giving substance to changes made by the Policing & Crime Act 2017 which amended S58(2) of the 1968 Act with regard to the definition of an antique firearm. The regulations followed the outcome of earlier consultation and confirmed September 1, 1939 as the cut-off date of manufacture. More controversially it removed 7 cartridges from the obsolete list, although to collectors' benefit 23 were added. Discussions with Home Office officials confirmed that S7 (Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997) status could be conferred upon those pistols which could no longer be held under S58(2) and that the owners of these pistols could apply for a firearm certificate in order to keep one. Equally important was the fact that they could be traded and thus their value was preserved as far as possible. The legislation passed through Parliament for commencement in 2021.

British Shooting Sports Council meetings

Meetings of the Finance & General Purposes and Technical & Research Committees were held on February 13. There was a full report on discussions with Home Office Minister Kit Malthouse MP which had been held two days earlier and which had covered antiques, medical involvement in firearms licensing, the proposed compensation scheme for firearms prohibited by the Offensive Weapons Act 2019, the future of the European Firearms Pass after Brexit, miniature rifle ranges and deactivated firearms. There was also a discussion about the Shoot Liaison Committee's newly announced plans for a transition from the use of lead shot in live quarry shooting with shotguns.

With no possibility of travel and all London meeting venues closed, all subsequent BSSC meetings were held online. Inevitably, the cancellation of all 'in person' meetings affected the way in which the Council was able to interact with partner organisations and cancellation of the Annual Luncheon removed an important event completely from the Council's calendar.

The BSSC Annual General Meeting was postponed from its usual timing in March and held instead on May 7 by videoconferencing. The Lord Robathan was invited to take on the role of BSSC President and he was duly elected. Lord Robathan has had a distinguished military and Parliamentary career and is a strong supporter of shooting sports in the House of Lords. Derek Stimpson was elected a Vice Chairman to serve alongside Martyn Jones. It was decided to suspend both the Finance & General Purposes and Technical & Research Committees, with the effect that all ongoing BSSC meetings became meetings of the full Council. Council took the opportunity to review actions taken since the imposition of Coronavirus lockdown and considered steps that shooting sports could take to re-start once the Covid-19 restrictions were eased.

Council met on July 16 and considered its relationship with and the need for better cooperation with the Shoot Liaison Committee. It looked towards a forthcoming Home Office consultation on 'Firearms Safety' and adopted an agreed position on the S11(4) exemption for miniature rifle ranges which would accommodate the reasonable requirements of smallbore target rifle shooting while at the same time being politically acceptable. The meeting also considered a report of a meeting on June 16 with the Home Office Minister, Kit Malthouse MP, on medical involvement in firearms licensing and discussed the developing situation regarding the EU Lead in Wetlands Regulation.

Council met on September 17 and agreed support for the Value of Shooting survey. It finalised its position on S11(4) miniature rifle ranges and considered progress over the return to organised outdoor sport following the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions three days previously. It noted in particular that live quarry shooting had been specifically exempted from the 'rule of six' restriction and that MoD ranges were expected to open soon for civilian use.

At its meeting on October 22, Council discussed the revised draft Statutory guidance to chief officers of police which had been circulated by the Home Office, noting with concern that the medical process had been placed firmly in the hands of the applicant's GP with the option to go to an alternative provider only if the applicant's GP refused to assist. It was felt that the text was still far from what had been discussed with the Minister. Council also discussed the meeting with DCC Dave Orford which had taken place two days previously and agreed arrangements for an online meeting of the Practitioners Group. In view of advice from the Home Office that the European Firearms Pass would no longer be issued or be valid in the UK after December 31, 2020, it was agreed that BSSC should press the case for EFPs to continue to be recognised for the purpose of granting a British Visitors Permit.

Meeting on December 3, Council discussed the Home Office 'Firearms Safety' consultation which had been launched on November 24. Positions had already been settled on miniature rifle ranges and security of high muzzle energy rifles, and consideration was given to the proposal to amend the law in respect of 'intent to manufacture' unauthorised ammunition. Greatest concern, however, was expressed over the Government's proposal to remove the exemption which permitted young people to use an airgun without supervision on private premises. This threatened the very foundation of shooting sports and rigorous opposition

to the proposed measure was resolved. Noting the worsening Coronavirus situation and the inevitability of a further extended period of national lockdown, Council decided to cancel yet again any plans for an Annual Luncheon in March 2021.

Coronavirus: firearms licensing

Following the Prime Minister's announcement of a lockdown of the UK on March 23, there was concern that, with reduced numbers of police staff available for firearms licensing duties and with all medical professionals facing new priorities, firearms licensing would be adversely affected. BSSC contacted police forces to determine their priorities and inevitably a range of approaches emerged, with many forces maintaining renewals but suspending new grants and variations along with home visits by Firearms Enquiry Officers. Forces also differed in their approach to medical checks on certificate renewals with some, such as Police Scotland, adopting a pragmatic position and holding that even if medical verification was not forthcoming it would renew and if necessary check medical evidence at a later date. Other forces took a hard line and continued to insist on a pre-application medical check, completed if necessary by a private GP company such as the emerging Medcert. The situation was discussed fully at a meeting on April 16 with DCC Dave Orford, Chair of the NPPC Firearms and Explosives Licensing Working Group (FELWG). It was recognised that response to the Covid 19 pandemic had come as a massive shock to policing and that while some forces had gone too far in their interpretation, firearms licensing departments had been advised, so far as was possible, to maintain business as usual so as not to create a problem in the future. It was accepted by all that grants and variations were not a priority except in special cases, such as for occupational reasons. It was also acknowledged that there had been a huge impact on the gun trade which, as 'non-essential retail' had been forced to close premises and furlough employees.

Coronavirus: reopening of ranges and shooting grounds

In the second half of April it became clear that the Government had plans for the reopening of some outdoor sports after lockdown, including golf and angling. Representations were therefore made to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Oliver Dowden MP, urging the Government to include in its plans outdoor rifle ranges and clay shooting grounds. Following further extensive contact with DCMS, it was finally confirmed in writing to the Chairman by Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston MP that outdoor shooting grounds and ranges could reopen. Simultaneously, DCC Dave Orford confirmed that pest control and deer management activities could resume. This positive news was greatly welcomed by BSSC member associations and the wider shooting community. Following the successful reopening of outdoor shooting ranges, the Chairman made representations to the Sports Minister over the status of indoor ranges and a formal response was received, confirming the arrangements under which indoor ranges could reopen. However, further concern followed the publication of the Government's revised Coronavirus restrictions on September 24 which failed to include any shooting association among its list of governing bodies of sport. Further representations were made by the BSSC Chairman to DCMS resulting in confirmation on October 14 that target shooting activities operating according to procedures laid down by national associations could continue. Similar advice was received from DEFRA in respect of quarry shooting. Thus target rifle shooting and clay shooting were able to continue operating, and a welcome start to the season was able to be enjoyed by game shoots. Shooting was able to continue in a modified

form under the more restrictive conditions imposed by the November lockdown, but had to cease in the closing days of 2020 with Covid-19 case numbers rising and the imposition of new and more rigorous restrictions.

European Firearms Pass

The European Firearms Pass is an international firearms ‘passport’ which facilitates travel with firearms by licenced owners and which assists British police forces in issuing Visitors Permits to inbound shooters travelling from outside the UK. Its future in Britain after Brexit became increasingly bleak as the end of the Brexit transition period approached. Nonetheless, BSSC argued strongly for its retention on the basis of a bilateral agreement similar to that adopted by Switzerland, and sought support for that position both within the UK Government and within the European Commission through its partner organisation in Europe. FACE agreed to contact the Commission at the highest level in order to recommend a bilateral arrangement between the EU and the UK over the EFP and sought a meeting with EU Chief negotiator Michel Barnier. At UK level, BSSC supported the preferred police position whereby the EFP would be used as primary evidence of the bona fides of visitors from the EU to the UK in the issuing of Visitor Permits. However, the increasingly intractable course of the Brexit negotiations made progress very slow and as the end of the Brexit transition approached, negotiations between the UK and EU became increasingly difficult. Even headline issues such as trade and fisheries were without conclusion and this offered little hope for matters far down the priority list such as the EFP. Communication with FACE also indicated that the EU negotiators were losing patience with the UK team and were no longer willing to advance this matter. The Government advised a post-Brexit operating model in early October and subsequently issued guidance which indicated the end of the EFP for Great Britain certificate holders, though willingness to consider the EFP in respect of visitors permit applications. Northern Ireland certificate holders retained full use of the EFP as a consequence of the Northern Ireland protocol.

FACE

The meeting of FACE UK on March 11 was the last ‘in-person’ meeting attended by BSSC during 2020 in a London which was becoming increasingly quiet by the day. The meeting reviewed UK voluntary phase-out proposals on lead in shotgun ammunition for live quarry shooting and noted that lead ammunition was the number one challenge across 37 European hunting associations. It was noted that with regard to the ongoing EU REACH process regarding restriction of lead in wetlands, if there were to be an expected vote in April, then a Regulation would come into effect in 2020 with a phase-out period of 24-36 months. DEFRA had confirmed that the UK was bound by this legislation during Brexit transition and would adopt into UK law any EU legislation implemented before the end of 2020. The Director General of FACE reiterated that this process of legislative restriction of lead in ammunition was moving in one direction only. Also discussed were trophy hunting and the challenge by Wild Justice over the release of gamebirds on or adjacent to European protected sites.

Firearms and Explosives Licensing stakeholder meeting

In the absence of a meeting of the Practitioners Group, which had become an early victim of the Coronavirus restrictions, it was agreed that in order to maintain communications between shooting associations and NPCC FELWG, a BSSC meeting with DCC Dave Orford would be helpful. An online meeting was therefore held in October, discussing a range of current and

outstanding issues including the upcoming surrender and compensation scheme for rapid-firing rifles prohibited under the Offensive Weapons Act, the impact of lack of use of target rifles during the Covid-19 lockdown on future renewals, deactivated firearms and EU status, the Firearms Security Handbook, the use of new technology to expedite grants and renewals, the moratorium on new grants by some forces during the Covid-19 restrictions, and police procedures for the granting of Visitor Permits, including use of the EFP.

Firearms Prevent Board

Both the BSSC Secretary and the Director of the GTA, along with the Secretary General of the National Farmers Union, were invited to the inaugural meeting, by telephone conferencing, of a body, the Firearms Prevent Board, set up by the National Crime Agency to address the threat posed by armed crime. Attendees covered the range of policing and regulatory bodies. The BSSC Secretary questioned the appropriateness of the group's name, saying that if it wished to command the support of the lawful shooting community, then it should specifically indicate that its goal was to prevent criminal use of firearms. The matter of the title was held over for further consideration. It was noted by NaBIS that there were strong parallels between this group and the existing CUF TNIAG, and it became evident that the TNIAG would be subsumed into it. The group received presentations on the threat assessment of illegal importation from Europe, shotgun theft, top venting blank firers, theft of MoD components and accessories, and the threat of criminal usage arising out of the investigation into the 'Full Metal Jacket' shooting club in Essex, the proprietors of which had successfully claimed in Court to be operating under S11(4). Both the GTA and BSSC agreed to liaise between the new NCA Board and the wider shooting community, whilst retaining reservations about the name 'Firearms Prevent Board' and keeping an open mind on the group's direction of travel.

Firearms Safety consultation

Discussion at a meeting with Home Office Minister Kit Malthouse MP indicated that the Government's intended consultation on 'firearms safety' was expected to embrace the security of .50 calibre firearms, controls on home-loading, further restriction on possession of air weapons by young people and a revision of the law surrounding miniature rifle ranges. BSSC spent a considerable amount of time refining its position on these questions and detailed work was undertaken on possible amendments to S11(4) which would enable the use of miniature rifles by school, college and university rifle clubs, scouts etc, but which would overcome Ministerial concerns about acquisition and keeping of firearms and ammunition by non-certificate holders. It was agreed that a reasonable route would be for a named individual to be responsible for the firearms and ammunition, who would need background checks of the same nature as for a Firearm Certificate. In due course, a jointly agreed BSSC position paper was finalised, and this was sent by the Chairman to the Minister. The consultation was published on November 24. It sought views on whether level 3 security was sufficient for HME rifles; on S11(4) it sought views on the definition of a 'miniature rifle' and proposed that operators of ranges should hold an FAC, which would mean background checks; and it proposed a new offence of 'intent to manufacture' unauthorised rounds of ammunition. Of particular concern was the proposal to remove the exemption which allows young people to use an airgun unsupervised on private land. As almost all shooters start their career with an air rifle, this proposed measure was identified as a fundamental threat to all shooting sports and it was resolved that it had to be resisted vigorously. After discussion with BSSC Council

members, the Secretary prepared a paper outlining suggested responses to the Home Office document and member associations were urged to engage their memberships in responding to the consultation.

Firearms Security Handbook

Following a case in Lincolnshire in which a certificate holder had been asked to install a monitored alarm system for a level 2 firearms holding after reference to the revised Firearms Security Handbook, the Secretary again raised with NPCC a series of concerns about the handbook that had been expressed at the end of 2019 but which remained unresolved. These included unsatisfactory guidance on the storage of shotgun ammunition, unnecessary requirements for monitored alarm systems and other matters. It was noted that the handbook was an online document and open to minor revision, and it was agreed that these matters should be the subject of discussion in detail between NPCC and BSSC. The outcome was agreement on all of the points but at the year end, revisions to the handbook had still not appeared online.

Lead in ammunition

Discussion around the speed and the extent of transition from lead-based ammunition to non-lead alternatives occupied a substantial proportion of the BSSC workload during the course of the year. Whilst believing that Britain would not, after Brexit, be subject to EU legislation, BSSC nevertheless recognised that the European approach would be likely to have a formative impact upon Government policy in the UK. It thus participated fully in the discussions, both directly with ECHA and, through FACE, with other European shooting associations.

Proposal for an EU Regulation prohibiting lead shot in Wetlands

After discussion in the EU REACH Committee on February 20, there remained concerns over the broad definition of wetlands, buffer zones, the transition period over which the draft legislation would be phased in, and the definition of ‘possession’. New legal issues had also been raised, namely whether a ban on use by individual consumers (i.e. hunters/shooters) fell within the competence of REACH and whether the ban imposed an illegal reverse burden of proof upon the hunter. The Commission nonetheless appeared determined to press through its proposal and an indicative vote on a third revision of the draft on June 23 suggested it had majority support. Member states were given until July 15 to confirm their views via formal voting. Despite its deficiencies, the legislation was approved by a majority within REACH and in September the Wetlands dossier was passed to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. In the Parliament’s ENVI Committee at the end of the month a resolution was tabled noting the deficiencies in the Regulation and proposing that it was sent back to the REACH Committee. This would have halted the legislation, but in the event, the resolution was narrowly lost by just 6 votes. The dossier then moved to a vote in the mid-November plenary session of the Parliament. With the legislation approved by all the EU institutions, it remained for it to be published in the Official Journal. Adoption is normally 20 days following publication, and it was confirmed in a letter to the BSSC Chairman by DEFRA Minister Rebecca Pow MP that if the adoption date occurred prior to the end of Brexit transition on December 31 then the Regulation would be adopted by the UK. In view of the threat to British shooting sports, the Chairman wrote both to Environment Secretary George Eustice MP and Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston MP expressing his concerns. In the event publication did not occur before the end of the year and the Regulation was thus not applicable to Great Britain. As a result of the Northern Ireland protocol, however, it did become applicable in Northern Ireland.

ECHA proposal for an Annex XV dossier restricting lead in all ammunition

In response to an ECHA consultation on an EU restriction on lead in all ammunition, BSSC conducted a survey of certificated firearms in the UK, with an assessment of those which would not be suited to non-lead ammunition, and including their values. The total value of shotguns which would not be suited to steel shot (i.e. older guns with short chambers, along with small gauge shotguns) was estimated at over £940m, the value of rifles unsuited to copper ammunition was estimated at £205m (centrefires less than 6.5mm) and £97m (rimfires). The value of muzzle loading firearms was estimated at £20m and airguns at £2,450m. Thus it was estimated that the total cost to firearms owners of a prohibition on lead ammunition was of the order of £3.7bn. This information was communicated both directly to ECHA and to FACE. BSSC also researched the practice of lead capture and recycling on outdoor rifle ranges and clay pigeon shooting grounds. Information was received about experience with the recycling of lead shot from the National Shooting Centre at Bisley, four UKPSA club grounds, 17 CPSA shooting grounds and the PSRA. A report was prepared and this was communicated to ECHA. BSSC also provided FACE with access to a study undertaken by ICSI on the comparative ricochet characteristics of lead shot and steel shot which showed that, unlike lead, steel shot retained much of its ballistic integrity and pellet energy after ricochet, sufficient to imprint a coherent pattern. The study highlighted the fact that more work needed to be done on the issue of steel shot ricochet in order to ensure safety both on shooting grounds and in the field. The ECHA dossier was expected to be published in October, but at the end of the year it had yet to be released.

Transition to non-lead shot in the UK:

In February, member associations of the Shoot Liaison Committee, a group of national associations concerned with game shooting and which included BASC and CA, published proposals that there should be in the UK a 5-year transition to non-lead shot for all live quarry shotgun shooting. It was their view that shooting sports could either lose lead by fighting a ban or it could alternatively manage the process of change by way of a voluntary initiative. It was confirmed that there had been no discussion about extending the transition process into clay target or rifle shooting.

Licensing of game bird release

Following a review prompted by an intervention by the environmental campaigning group Wild Justice, DEFRA announced its intention to introduce a licensing regime for the release of pheasant and red-legged partridge in and around European protected sites. BASC and CA reacted strongly to the proposal and sought consultation with Ministers. DEFRA had chosen not to consult in advance with either BASC, CA or any other shooting association before making their announcement for this general licence arrangement. BASC responded by restating its support of the rules for releasing gamebirds that underpin the Code of Good Shooting Practice.

Media Training

With the increasing likelihood that BSSC member associations would be asked to represent shooting sports on the broadcast media or online, the Council decided to bring forward plans for a media training course. Although initially the proposal was postponed by the Covid-19 lockdown and the consequent restriction on meetings, revised plans were drawn up to hold the course online by videoconferencing, which had in any case become the primary method of newsgathering. Two courses were arranged and eight delegates from BSSC member associations received professional media training.

Offensive Weapons Act

With the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 already in force, Home Office officials contacted BSSC with early drafts of a proposed Regulation to introduce a surrender and compensation scheme for ‘faster firing’ rifles prohibited under the Act, along with drafts of an associated guidance note and claim form. BSSC assisted by providing detailed valuations of MARS and Lever Release rifles along with their accessories which would be subject to compensation. At length, a draft Statutory Instrument authorising the hand-in and compensation scheme was received from the Home Office and this completed its passage through Parliament. BSSC then liaised with police forces over the procedures to be adopted by forces during the course of the surrender process.

Practitioners Group

With a meeting scheduled for March 31, the Practitioners Group was an early casualty of the initial Covid-19 lockdown and it was not until late November that the group met, by videoconferencing. In addition to regular police and Home Office attendees, the Secretary issued additional invitations to NaBIS, NCA and the British Proof Authority, all of which attended as well as ten BSSC member associations. There was a Home Office briefing covering the ongoing consultation on Statutory Guidance, the newly published ‘Firearms Safety’ consultation, MARS and Lever Release compensation, deactivated guns and Brexit and the use of EFPs after Brexit. A police update reported on the implications for grants and renewals of the new tiered system of Covid-19 regulations, online applications and renewals, and the future of NFLMS which would be moved from Hendon to a new ‘virtual’ estate in 2021 as part of a general upgrading of policing IT. Police Scotland reported that in the light of Covid-19 restrictions, renewals were being prioritised. There was a discussion on antiques, in which it was confirmed by the Home Office that collectors with firearms which were to be moved to ‘prohibited’ status but which met the criteria for S7 of the 1997 Act would be able to apply, at no cost, for a firearm certificate.

Statutory Guidance to Chief Officers of police

The matter of medical involvement in the grant and renewal of firearm and shotgun certificates remained a central plank in the work of BSSC during the course of the year. A requirement to issue Statutory guidance to Chief Officers of police on the administration of firearms licencing was provided for within the Policing & Crime Act 2017, and in March 2019 it had been made clear by the Home Office that the precise detail surrounding medical verification would be included as part of that Statutory guidance. The matter had subsequently been consulted on by Government in 2019. On February 11, at a meeting with Home Office Minister Kit Malthouse MP, BSSC expressed concern that, five months on from the close of the consultation, no further progress had been made on the medical issue and that meanwhile, an increasing number of police forces were taking their own line independently of Home Office advice. BSSC’s central concerns were about doctors’ fees for completing the medical check and the efficacy of the permanent marker to be placed upon the patient record. Moreover, there was a reasonable expectation from the shooting organisation that the proper application of continuous medical monitoring should lead to a 10 year certificate life. The Minister noted that the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, Jo Churchill MP, was in negotiation with the Royal College of GPs over the marker and he proposed further discussions at the House of Commons to include the Department of Health, BSSC Chairman Jonathan Djanogly MP and Sir Geoffrey

Clifton-Brown, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Shooting and Conservation. There was a further meeting by videoconferencing on June 16 including representatives of the BMA and RCGP, as well as DCC Dave Orford for the police in which a number of points of detail were hammered out, in particular whether it should be for the applicant or the police to approach the doctor. It was accepted by BSSC that responsibility would rest with the applicant, but at the same time both the Minister and the police acknowledged the case for a 10 year certificate. Summing up, the Minister proposed giving a longer certificate life in return for the increased administrative burden on the applicant, but he acknowledged that there was a need for more work on the medical fee.

In October the Home Office issued an amended iteration of the proposed Statutory Guidance which included at its heart the proposals for medical involvement in firearms licensing. However, a number of key issues remained unresolved, in particular the ability of an applicant to employ the services of a private doctor to complete the medical check, the requirement for the applicant's GP to place the permanent marker, the medical fee and the extension of certificate life. There was further correspondence with the Minister and a further meeting with Home Office officials in December at which it was promised that another draft of the Statutory guidance would be issued early in 2021.

Trophy Hunting

In response to a DEFRA consultation on the import and export of hunting trophies, BSSC highlighted the very considerable economic, cultural, social and food benefits accruing to local communities where large game hunting takes place overseas, stating that there were sufficient existing levels of control to address the conservation of endangered species without any further restriction on imports. A ban on all hunting trophies leaving the UK would, argued BSSC, cause very substantial damage to UK deer stalking as it would discourage, if not prevent entirely, the flow of visiting hunters to sporting estates across the country and especially to the Scottish Highlands. The economic fallout would be very considerable, as would be the impact upon the necessary management of wild deer in the UK. There was significant media interest in the consultation, with the matter coming up at Prime Minister's Questions. In view of the potential impact which restrictions might have upon the gun trade and deer management in particular, BSSC maintained a watching brief over the issue of trophy hunting.

Value of Shooting survey

Five years after the last update survey was undertaken by Public and Corporate Economic Consultants into the economic and conservation value of shooting, it was recognised across the shooting community that a new study was required. BASC therefore assembled a steering group to oversee a survey covering both live quarry and target shooting in all its aspects, looking especially at the economic and the social benefits that are derived from shooting sports. BSSC budgeted significant financial support for the work, and tender applications were sought by a newly established Value of Shooting survey secretariat from suitably qualified research bodies and consortia. As a major funding partner, BSSC was represented on the interview panel along with BASC and CA. It was anticipated that the results of the survey would be launched in September 2021.

World Forum on Shooting Activities

With the cancellation of the annual IWA trade show due to the rapidly developing Coronavirus epidemic in Germany and pressure on international travel, the planned series of WFSA meetings on March 4-5 in the margins of IWA was postponed until the autumn. Then, as international travel came to an abrupt halt, the scheduled series of WFSA meeting that were expected to be held in Portugal in September was instead held by videoconferencing. There was a review of international firearms legislation, noting the prohibition on military-style assault rifles in Canada following a mass shooting in New Brunswick in March 2020, and new firearms legislation in Germany where target shooters who had been shooting for 10 or more years became exempt from the need to record their attendance at clubs and ranges and where sound moderators and the use of thermal imaging and image intensifying sights was now permitted. There was a full discussion within WFSA on legislation to restrict lead in ammunition within the EU. A further meeting was held to consider the World Forum's future direction and way forward. It was agreed that this should take advantage of technology and online meetings and should aim at hosting webinars prior to and post each major UN event, the object being to prepare for the meeting, encourage more participation, establish clear goals, deliver effective messages and, if necessary, organise online side events.

Correspondence concerning this report, or other matters
relevant to the British Shooting Sports Council,
should be addressed to:

Graham Downing
Secretary
British Shooting Sports Council
PO Box 79
Halesworth
IP19 1BB

Telephone: 01986 834154
Email: secretary@bssc.org.uk
Website www.bssc.org.uk

© 2021 BSSC

Printed by Micropress Printers Ltd, IP18 6SZ