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David Stewart MSP

Convener

Public Petitions Committee

Room T3.40

The Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh

EH99 1SP



Your ref: PE1485
Our ref: A6745598
17 September 2013

Dear David

PUBLIC PETITION PE1485 ON AIRGUN LICENSING IN SCOTLAND

Thank you for your letter of 4 September following the Public Petitions Committee's consideration of the above petition, lodged by Mr David Ewing, on the issue of our plans to regulate air weapons in Scotland. You have sought information on a number of points raised in oral evidence and I will deal with each of your points in turn.

- *What is the proposed timescale for the introduction by the Scottish Government of proposed legislation which covers airgun licensing in Scotland?*

On 3 September the First Minister announced the Scottish Government's Programme for Government for 2013-14. The programme includes a new Licensing Bill, to be introduced during the course of this parliamentary year, which will include provisions to regulate air weapons using the powers newly devolved under the Scotland Act 2012.

- *Do you agree with the statistics and estimated figures, such as those for the number of airguns in Scotland and the cost of implementing airgun licensing, that were stated by the petitioners during the oral evidence session at the above meeting of the Committee?*

No. In November 2011 I convened the Scottish Firearms Consultative Panel (SFCP), comprising shooting and weapons experts and stakeholders, to help us develop our proposals for a new licensing regime. As part of their work the Panel, which included Dr Shedden who gave evidence to your Committee, sought to estimate the potential number of air weapons in circulation in Scotland. An upper limit of 500,000 guns was arrived at with the aid of the Gun Trade Association and other stakeholders, and was agreed in

discussion by the Panel. In the foreword to our public consultation paper *Proposals for Licensing Air Weapons in Scotland*, which I launched on 14 December 2012, I noted that it is not appropriate “that there can be up to half a million unregistered, uncontrolled and often forgotten firearms in circulation”. This is different to Dr Shedden’s statement to the Committee that:

“The 500,000 estimate is a minimum figure, which is based on information from the Gun Trade Association that was supplied to the Scottish Government through the Scottish firearms consultative panel. The panel accepted that as a minimum figure...”

In fact, that was not what the Panel agreed.

In terms of the financial estimates suggested to the Committee by Mr Ewing, he appears simply to have taken this figure of 500,000 air weapons and multiplied it by a round figure of £200, referring to work done by the Association of Chief Police Officers in England and Wales on the full costs of licensing firearms and shotguns under the present arrangements. In doing so, Mr Ewing arrived at a figure of £100 million to introduce the new regime in Scotland.

I do not accept this estimate. Mr Ewing’s figures take no account of the fact that we aim to introduce an efficient and practicable system of licensing modelled on existing arrangements. In addition, we anticipate that a significant number of unwanted air weapons will be surrendered or disposed of by their current owners; that a single application process will be used to cover multiple weapons held by a single user; and that the new system will include payment of a fee on application which will offset the costs of operating the scheme.

In developing our detailed proposals for legislation I will, of course, be preparing the required supporting documents for the Bill, which will include clear estimates of the anticipated costs of the air weapons licensing arrangements. We will develop these figures in consultation with the Police Service of Scotland and other stakeholders.

- *What organisations and clubs has the Scottish Government consulted with on this issue?*

As noted above, our public consultation paper launched on 14 December 2012. This was sent to more than 100 organisations, clubs and other stakeholders, as well as individuals. A full listing of the organisations notified is set out at Annex E of the consultation document, which can be found at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0041/00410460.pdf>

Copies of all the non-confidential responses to the consultation were published on 3 May 2013 and can be found at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/crimes/Firearms/governmentaction/airweaponlicensing/consultationresponses>

- *What consideration has the Scottish Government given to how people might be encouraged to surrender unwanted airguns?*

We are very aware of the importance of ensuring that air weapon holders are made aware of any new licensing requirements, and have identified a number of different groups who will comprise the audience for any communication campaign in Scotland, the rest of the UK and around the world. The final section of our consultation paper dealt with this issue specifically and sought views on how best to spread the message once the arrangements are to come into place. I am grateful to the 283 people and organisations who responded to that question and whose advice we will take into account as we prepare for implementation of the new licensing regime.

I trust the Committee finds this information helpful.

KENNY MACASKILL