



**National Sheep Association**

The Sheep Centre, Malvern  
Worcestershire, WR13 6PH

Tel: 01684 892661

Fax: 01684 892663

[enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk)

[www.nationalsheep.org.uk](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk)

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Dear Sirs,

Please find the National Sheep Association's (NSA) response to your questions in the Defra call for evidence on general licences for the management of certain birds.

My name is Mr Philip Stocker and I am Chief Executive of the NSA. My email address is [pstocker@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:pstocker@nationalsheep.org.uk) .

Yours sincerely,

Phil Stocker  
NSA Chief Executive



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National Sheep Association is an organisation which represents the views and interests of sheep producers throughout the UK.  
NSA is funded by its membership of sheep farmers and its activities involve it in every aspect of the sheep industry.

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## 1) Your views on the alternatives to killing or taking a specific bird species for:

- Conserving flora and fauna
- Preserving public health or safety
- Preventing serious damage or disease (serious damage relates to serious damage to livestock, foodstuffs for livestock, crops, vegetables, fruit, growing timber fisheries or inland waters) In particular, what are these alternatives and to which bird species do they relate? In your experience or evidence, how effective and practicable are they?

*The NSAs main interest in controlling certain wild birds relates to damage caused to sheep, mainly by Carrion Crows and Ravens (not covered by general licensing). This is a significant problem for sheep farmers particularly, but not exclusively, at and around lambing time. However, many sheep farmers also are affected by certain bird species that cause crop damage in young forage crops, mainly Woodpigeons and Rooks, and with their interest in biodiversity and wildlife the damage done to small birds by Magpies at nesting time. Alternatives to killing, such as scaring techniques, are usually temporary with birds quickly learning and ignoring scarecrows/kites and bangers. Alternatives are not effective over the long term and they allow undesirable behavioural traits to become established in individual and colonies of birds. On the other hand, the ability to kill a number of birds can quickly reduce undesirable behaviour such as attacking lambs at birth. It should be remembered that sheep farmers are being encouraged to lamb outside for health and welfare reasons and being encouraged to plant trees which act as cover and perch points for predatory birds. Both these actions increase the risks of bird attacks on sheep and lambs.*

## 2) Your experience or evidence of any benefits that were delivered by the three revoked general licences?

*Before being revoked the general licences allowed farmers to control situations quickly and take decisive action. This was done to prevent serious problems building up and was arguably in the interest of the species being controlled – to ensure their behaviour is compatible with other legitimate and essential business and environmental activities. The general licences reduced the incidences of pain and suffering to sheep and lambs (the tearing out of tongues of*



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*lambs at birth, the pecking out of eyes in ewes giving birth or being cast on their backs, and the opening of lambs stomachs to eat internal organs). They also reduced sheep losses and contributed towards productivity gains. The evidence for the benefits of the general licences which allowed the control of Magpies and Crows, in particular to raiding nests of many other avian species, is obvious and evident.*

**3) Your experience or evidence of any problems with or caused by the three revoked general licences. Are there any conditions, in your view, that could be attached to general licences to address these issues?**

*We are unaware of any problems caused by the general licences. Most importantly the general licences have not put at risk the populations of the species involved but have allowed the sustainable avoidance and reduction of animal welfare and environmental damage.*

**4) Your experience or evidence of any problems caused by the revocation of the three revoked general licences.**

*Our evidence of problems caused by the revocation of the three general licences is based on conversations with, and calls from NSA members that they have suffered lamb losses and experienced damage to ewes (as outlined above). This is not unusual and even with general licences damage is experienced. However, conversations suggest that losses and damage have increased since the general licences were revoked. Our members have also strongly said that they having to spend more time scaring birds, and that scaring simply moves the birds on to affect someone else or indeed affect them later on.*



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