

# A manifesto for sustainable shooting

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Scottish Parliament  
Election 2026





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## A. Introduction

Scotland's countryside is not just a landscape, it is a working environment managed every day by people with deep knowledge, skills and a commitment to stewardship.

Shooting is a lawful, responsible and integral part of this management. It supports conservation outcomes, sustains rural jobs and underpins investment in habitats, wildlife and Scotland's natural heritage.

In recent years, however, the relationship between policymakers and the people who manage the land has become strained at times. Regulation affecting shooting and land management has grown rapidly, often shaped by political agendas and campaigning narratives rather than practical evidence or scientific experience. The result is growing uncertainty, declining trust, and a risk that well-intentioned environmental goals, including nature recovery and climate resilience, may be undermined by poorly designed policy.

BASC represents thousands of responsible shooters across Scotland, people who are committed to delivering conservation and sustaining Scotland's countryside. Our members actively manage habitats, control species humanely, and support wildlife projects which contribute to biodiversity and carbon-rich landscapes. They are not opponents of environmental ambition, but they insist that regulation must be proportionate, practical and informed by those who understand the land best.

As Scotland approaches the 2026 Scottish Parliament election, BASC calls for a reset. Policymaking must recognise shooting as a constructive force for conservation and rural sustainability, engage meaningfully with rural communities, and ensure that legislation strengthens rather than undermines the stewardship that protects Scotland's landscapes, wildlife, and natural capital. Scotland's environmental and climate ambitions will only be achieved through partnership, trust and respect for practical expertise on the ground.

BASC stands ready to work with any political party committed to securing a thriving countryside, for nature, for communities and for future generations.



## Summary of policy proposals

- 1.** Public recognition of the importance of sustainable shooting and practical conservation to the Scottish rural economy, health and wellbeing, food production, rural heritage, culture and social life across Scotland.
- 2.** Acknowledgement that sustainable shooting delivers clear environmental benefits. As such, sustainable shooting represents a major, yet underused, resource for tackling climate change and biodiversity loss.
- 3.** A commitment from the Scottish Government to work with practitioners using scientific evidence and fact-based approaches.
- 4.** Review current/outdated legislation and licensing to ensure it supports self-regulation and is workable for the sector.
- 5.** Ultimately we want candidates to pledge to support sustainable shooting and conservation for generations to come.



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## **B. Policy proposals on sustainable shooting in Scotland**

### **1. Economic contribution**

The Scottish Government should recognise sustainable shooting as an important contributor to Scotland's rural economy. Shooting supports employment, land management and the hospitality and tourism sectors, particularly during the winter off-season, helping sustain businesses in remote and fragile rural and island communities.

### **2. Physical and mental health benefits**

The Scottish Government should acknowledge the contribution of shooting and field sports to physical activity, mental wellbeing and community cohesion. Participation encourages outdoor exercise and social interaction, helping address public health priorities such as mental health and obesity, particularly in rural areas where isolation can be significant.

### **3. Promotion of Scottish venison and game meat**

The Scottish Government should promote the nutritional and environmental benefits of Scottish game meat, which is typically low in fat and often locally sourced. Support should be provided for processing and market development, with a long-term ambition to include game meat in public sector procurement for schools, hospitals and other institutions, in line with Good Food Nation objectives.

### **4. Protection and education on land management**

We recognise that skilled, knowledgeable practitioners are essential to sustainable land management, wildlife conservation and the rural economy. BASC Scotland will support high-quality education and training opportunities in colleges, universities and vocational institutions, working in partnership with educators, industry bodies and employers to ensure young people and career changers can access modern, science-led and practical learning.

By investing in education, apprenticeships and continuous professional development, we will help secure a skilled workforce, uphold the highest standards of professionalism and safeguard Scotland's sporting and rural heritage for generations to come.



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## C. Key themes that underpin our message

### **Evidence and practitioner-led approach to all wildlife and land management policymaking**

We will advocate for a regulatory framework that is evidence-based, proportionate and developed in partnership with those who manage land and wildlife. Regulation affecting shooting and land management must be grounded in robust scientific evidence and real-world operational experience, rather than political ideology or pressure from single-interest groups. We oppose the cumulative layering of legislation which incrementally undermines viability without clear conservation benefit. Any new regulatory proposals should be subject to full impact assessment, including economic, environmental and animal welfare considerations, and reviewed regularly to ensure they remain justified and effective.

### **Recognition of shooting's role in conservation delivery**

We will champion the role of sustainable shooting as a cornerstone of effective conservation and land management. Shooting contributes directly to habitat management, species control, biodiversity outcomes and long-term stewardship of the countryside. Policy must recognise and protect the private investment, skills and labour which shooting brings to conservation delivery. Measures which risk removing these incentives must be accompanied by credible and funded alternatives, rather than assuming conservation outcomes will be maintained by regulation alone.

### **Protecting skills, heritage, and future participation**

We will work to safeguard the future of shooting by supporting skills, training, and access for the next generation. Shooting represents a body of knowledge and stewardship skills built over generations. A sustainable future requires making participation lawful, achievable and socially understood, not allowing decline through accumulated barriers.

### **Genuine consultation and accountability in decision making**

We demand consultation processes which are transparent, accountable and demonstrably influential. Stakeholder engagement must be more than procedural. Policymakers should clearly show how consultation responses have shaped outcomes and provide justification where evidence-based concerns are not adopted.



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## D. Specific policies

### **Community integrated deer management on public land**

We would like to establish community integrated deer management schemes on publicly owned land, giving local people access to affordable wild meat while strengthening ethical deer management. We would like to see community deer larders support food security, skills development and community resilience, ensuring Scotland's natural resources deliver real benefit to the public.

### **Incentives for deer management**

BASC Scotland supports targeted incentives to encourage responsible deer management across Scotland. By providing financial and practical support to land managers, we can reduce overpopulation, protect habitats and maintain balanced ecosystems.

### **Reinstate full sporting rates relief for shootings and deer forests**

BASC Scotland calls for the reinstatement of the Small Business Bonus Scheme (SBBS) for sporting rates, to support shootings and deer forests. This measure helps sustain rural businesses, protects vital countryside employment and encourages responsible land management, ensuring sporting estates can continue contributing to biodiversity, tourism and local communities.

### **Wildfire mitigation and reform of muirburn regulation**

BASC Scotland wants the Scottish Government to establish a stakeholder-led Wildfire Management Taskforce. In light of the Dava-Carrbridge fires, we need to see more funding for wildfire prevention, both for SFRS and also for private equipment and training. On muirburn, we would like the Scottish Government to move away from the current muirburn licensing system and towards a proportionate, evidence-led framework which recognises Scotland's diverse landscapes. Land management must protect peatlands and biodiversity while enabling responsible practices which reduce wildfire risk and support rural livelihoods. Decisions will be guided by science, regional conditions and accountability, not blanket rules.



### **Supporting natural capital for public good**

We would like the Scottish Government to invest in natural capital as a public good, supporting land managers and communities to restore habitats, protect soils and water and enhance biodiversity and carbon storage. Funding will be long-term and outcome-focused, rewarding stewardship that delivers lasting benefits for people, climate and nature.

### **Protecting wildfowling with a practitioner-led wildfowling strategy**

Wildfowling is part of Scotland's coastal heritage and a vital contributor to wetland conservation. We would like the Scottish Government to protect responsible access to foreshore and wetlands, support clubs and volunteers and ensure conservation policy is developed with those who manage and know these places best.

### **A land-based skills training fund**

We will create a land-based skills training fund to support training in deer management, gamekeeping, butchery, habitat restoration, forestry and rural trades. This will tackle skills shortages, create secure rural jobs and ensure Scotland has the people and knowledge needed to care for the land into the future.

### **Women in shooting and young people**

BASC Scotland is committed to making shooting accessible to women and young people, breaking down barriers to participation. By supporting inclusive initiatives, education, training and mentorship, we aim to diversify the sport, inspire the next generation of countryside enthusiasts and ensure a thriving, sustainable future for shooting in Scotland.



### **Futures in the Field, let's protect rural college places for young custodians of the countryside**

Securing education and training opportunities is essential for sustaining rural employment. BASC Scotland champions the protection of college places for aspiring gamekeepers, ensuring young people can access practical, hands-on training. This safeguards vital skills, supports rural economies and nurtures the next generation of professionals dedicated to sustainable land and wildlife management.

### **Public procurement of venison and game meat**

BASC Scotland promotes wild venison as a sustainable, nutritious food source for schools and health boards. By integrating venison into public procurement, we support local economies, encourage ethical wildlife management and contribute to food security, helping communities access high-quality protein while fostering stronger links between rural producers and urban consumers.

### **An evidence-based approach to mountain hare conservation**

We advocate evidence-based management of mountain hare populations to protect upland habitats and ensure ecological balance. BASC Scotland supports research-led culling where necessary, while promoting coexistence and conservation awareness. Responsible population control safeguards moors, preserves biodiversity and sustains the cultural and economic value of Scotland's upland landscapes.

### **Humane cable restraints under licence**

The banning of humane cable restraints (or modern snares) is only exacerbating issues around over predation. We must see the Scottish Government look at a licensing system which allows for their use to prevent agricultural damage, manage predators of vulnerable species and for conservation/research.

### **Venison and game on public sector menus**

BASC Scotland wants to build on existing work and see the Scottish Government commit to ensuring venison and game meat is part of meals in schools and hospitals across Scotland.



### **Production of a five-year Feral Pig and Wild Boar Management Action Plan for Scotland**

Feral pigs are established in parts of Scotland, particularly around Loch Ness. It is vital that Scotland develops and implements a management plan while there is still opportunity to stop the spread of feral pigs across the country and prevent the variety of associated negative impacts they can have on livestock, public health and the landscape.

### **Championing Scottish country tourism**

VisitScotland and the Scottish Government must champion Scotland's country tourism sector as a vital contributor to rural economies, culture and conservation. It is incumbent on them to promote sustainable shooting, fishing, stalking and countryside recreation, working with government, local authorities, and businesses to ensure visitors can enjoy Scotland's landscapes responsibly while supporting local jobs and communities.

### **Stricter penalties on poaching**

We will press for stronger enforcement and clearer legislation to tackle poaching and wildlife crime. The Scottish Government must support increased resources for Police Scotland and rural crime units, tougher penalties for offenders and improved cross-border cooperation to disrupt organised criminal activity.

### **Protecting self-regulation**

BASC defends the principle of responsible self-regulation within Scotland's sporting and land management communities. We will support robust codes of practice, accreditation schemes and professional standards which demonstrate high levels of animal welfare, safety and environmental stewardship. BASC will oppose unnecessary bureaucracy and disproportionate regulation (such as mandatory training for deer management), advocating instead for evidence-based policy which recognises the effectiveness of industry-led governance.



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## E. Conclusion

In conclusion, this manifesto sets out a clear and constructive vision for the future of sustainable shooting and land management in Scotland.

Shooting is a contributor to conservation, rural economies, cultural heritage and community wellbeing.

By advocating for evidence-led policy, genuine stakeholder engagement and proportionate regulation, the manifesto calls for a reset in the relationship between policymakers and land managers.

It emphasises the need to protect skills, support education and participation, promote game meat and invest in natural capital and biodiversity outcomes.

Through targeted proposals on deer management, wildfire mitigation, rural training, tourism and wildlife conservation, BASC Scotland seeks to ensure Scotland's environmental and climate ambitions are achieved through partnership, trust and practical expertise.

**Ultimately, BASC wants to see Scotland champion a thriving, resilient countryside for present and future generations, which has, at its heart, shooting and conservation.**

**Let's protect shooting and conservation for generations to come.**

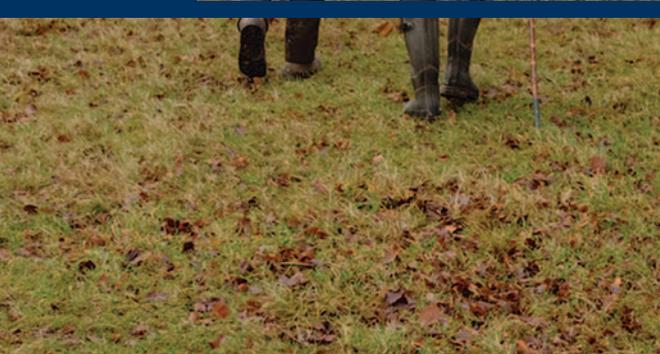


## About BASC

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) is the largest shooting organisation in the United Kingdom, with a membership of 150,000, including 11,000 members in Scotland. BASC employs 140 staff across the UK, who are dedicated to securing the future of sustainable shooting sports and the vital role they play in our environment, economy and culture.

We would like to thank our members who have helped to shape this manifesto through their detailed submissions to our survey.





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