

Debate Pack

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e-petition debate on hunting

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Summary

There will be a Petitions Committee debate in the House of Commons on 25 April on two petitions related to hunting with hounds.

1 Background

There will be a Petitions Committee debate in the House of Commons on 25 April on two petitions related to hunting with hounds.

The first, [e-petition 552017 Stop Forestry England granting licenses for Fox & Hare hunts](#), closed on 6 April 2021 with 104,705 signatures. It called for Forestry England to “stop granting licences to hunts that are continuing to use the myth of ‘trail hunting’ to chase and kill wildlife”.

The second, [e-petition 584076 Mini’s law - Protect the public and animals from hunting activities](#), closed on 29 October 2021 with 101,997 signatures. It called for the prohibition of “any activity involving hunting hounds, such as trail hunts and hound exercise, taking place in a residential area or in any other public place”.

1.1 The Hunting Act 2004

The [Hunting Act 2004](#) bans the hunting with dogs of all wild mammals, and all hare coursing. There are exemptions set out in Schedule I of the Act, which allow hunting activities to take place in limited circumstances and with the consent of the occupier or owner of the land:

- stalking and flushing wild mammals with up to two dogs
- use of dogs below ground to protect birds for shooting
- ratting, rabbiting, retrieval of hares and flushing for falconry
- recapture of wild mammals
- rescue of wild mammals
- research and observation.

A person found guilty of an offence under the Act faces a fine of up to £5,000, and could have their dogs, vehicles or articles used in hunting confiscated. The [Crown Prosecution Service prosecution guidance for the Hunting Act](#) provides further detail of how the Act is implemented in practice.

Statistics on the specific offences prosecuted under the Act are available from 2013 onwards and are shown in the table below. Most prosecutions under the Act have been for ‘hunting a wild mammal with a dog’. In the earlier part of this period, there were quite a few prosecutions related to hare coursing (mostly in 2013), though these have declined over time.

Detailed offences prosecuted under the Hunting Act 2004, since 2013									
By year and outcome									
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Hunting a wild mammal with a dog									
Prosecutions	87	60	84	49	49	45	43	25	442
Convictions	44	35	41	29	21	19	17	17	223
Knowingly permitting a dog to be used in the course of hunting a wild mammal									
Prosecutions	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	6
Convictions	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	5
Knowingly permitting land to be entered or used in the course of hunting a wild mammal with dogs									
Prosecutions	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Convictions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Participating in a hare coursing event									
Prosecutions	12	0	8	6	1	0	6	0	33
Convictions	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	8
Attending a hare coursing event									
Prosecutions	11	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	14
Convictions	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8

Source: MoJ, Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly, '[Principal offence proceedings and outcomes by Home Office offence code data tool](#)'

1.2

Trail hunting

The legislation does not ban hunts or their hounds from taking part in any other activities. Since the legislation was implemented, hunts have continued to meet and take part in trail hunts, where a scent trail is laid for hounds to follow.

[The Hunting Office](#) is the executive arm of the hunting with hounds associations. Established in 2004, its purpose is to “set and maintain high standards of conduct in the activity of hunting with hounds”. It provides an [explanation of the practice of trail hunting](#) on its website, which includes the following points:

- The aim of Trail Hunting is to simulate traditional hunting as practised before the Hunting Act came into force. During the Autumn and Winter months, packs of hounds and their followers (mounted and on foot) meet and go hunting - the general conduct of the day remains as it was prior to the Hunting Act and keeps the traditions and practises alive.
- The Hunting day operates over land which the hunt has been invited to cross by the landowner, and the trails are laid along a route that might be taken by the traditional quarry, through hedgerows & woods, along ditches, across fields, in order to simulate the natural movement of the wild mammal as much as possible.

- There is often more than one trail layer and the most common method of laying the trail is to drag a scent infected sock or cloth along the ground.
- It is highly likely that foxes, deer, hares, rabbits, birds and other forms of wildlife associated with the countryside, will be seen throughout the day. If the hounds pick up the scent of a live quarry, the huntsman and other members of hunt staff stop the hounds as soon as they are made aware that the hounds are no longer following a trail that has been laid.¹

The Hunt Office also highlights that hunts record and keep evidence of trail laying and hunt activities in response to “spurious allegations from our opponents that hunts are not Trail Hunting, [and] the presence of Saboteurs trying to intentionally disrupt the legal activities”.²

The largest member of the Hunting Office is the [Master of Foxhounds Association \(MFHA\)](#) which has 170 member packs in England and Wales and eight in Scotland.³ The Countryside Alliance referred to the number of packs still working and its dissatisfaction with the Hunting Act in a statement in April 2022, [The Hunting Act – Seventeen years on:](#)

We cannot celebrate what is ultimately a bad law today, but we can celebrate the fact that the majority of hunts continue to carry out their lawful hunting activities at least twice a week with those involved reaping the many economic, social, physical and mental health benefits that hunting provides across multiple generations.⁴

Conviction for encouraging and assisting evading the hunting ban

In October 2021, Mark Hankinson, a director of the MFHA, was found guilty of encouraging and assisting evading the ban on hunting during two private webinars. This was reported as follows [in an article on the BBC News website:](#)

A senior fox hunter has been found guilty of encouraging and assisting people to evade the ban on fox hunting.

Recordings of Mark Hankinson, a director of the Master of Foxhounds Association, speaking to around 100 senior hunters in two private webinars in August 2020 were leaked online.

The prosecution argued he was giving advice on how to avoid the law.

The defence said he was advising what to do if saboteurs disrupt legal hunts.

¹ [The Hunting Office, What is trail hunting? \[website visited 20 April 2022\]](#)

² [The Hunting Office, What is trail hunting? \[website visited 20 April 2022\]](#)

³ [The Hunting Office, Masters of Foxhounds Association, \[website visited 20 April 2022\]](#)

⁴ [Countryside Alliance, The Hunting Act – Seventeen years on, 18 April 2022](#)

At Westminster court Deputy Chief Magistrate Tan Ikram said "I am sure that the defendant through his words was giving advice on how to illegally hunt with dogs."

"In my judgement he was clearly encouraging the mirage of trail laying to act as cover for illegal hunting," he added.

Mr Hankinson was fined £1,000 along with a contribution of £2,500 towards legal costs.⁵

[The full judgement](#) is available on the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary website. [An appeal date against the verdict](#) has been set for 6 July 2022.

Concerns over the effectiveness of the legislation

Since the introduction of the Hunting Act 2004 there have been ongoing concerns from campaigners and animal welfare organisations that trail hunting and other activities with hunting packs can be used as cover for illegal hunts. Whether trail laying activity is genuine or not is the main area of contention between hunts and hunting campaigners monitoring hunts.

This is [referred to by the RSPCA](#) in its calls for the Hunting Act to be strengthened:

Trail hunting involves laying a trail for hounds to follow, using urine, body parts and carcasses from animals such as foxes. Some fear trail hunting is being used as a smokescreen to get around the law and continue traditional, illegal fox hunting, which would be a major concern.

This new 'sport' was adopted by hunts after the Hunting Act 2004 was passed. But despite the ban on traditional hunts, continuing to train hounds to follow such scents could lead to wild quarry animals such as foxes being disturbed, chased and killed if they pick up the scent of a live animal on the trail. In addition, the hunts' dogs may well disturb non-targeted animals, who then may also suffer from injury and stress.⁶

The RSPCA does not oppose [drag hunting](#), in which hounds follow an artificially laid non-animal scent. However, it would like to see the following changes to the legislation:

- Introducing an offence of recklessly hunting a wild mammal
- A tighter definition of hunting to include 'searching for'
- Repealing certain exemptions which can act as loopholes

⁵ [BBC News, Mark Hankinson: Top huntsman guilty of encouraging illegal fox hunting, 15 October 2021](#)

⁶ [RSPCA, Fox Hunting \[website visited 20 April 2022\]](#)

- Increased sentencing to include custodial sentences as well as fines and for any convictions to be recorded like other crimes
- A ban on the use of animal products for laying trails for trail hunting
- For trail hunts to be registered and required to provide maps of the trails to the police in advance and record instances where foxes have been killed by hounds.⁷

The League Against Cruel Sports view is that trail hunting is used to cover illegal hunting activities, and [also calls for the Hunting Act to be strengthened](#). It states that:

There is no such a thing as the 'sport of trail hunting' and it is simply a temporary, false alibi to cover for illegal hunting while the hunting fraternity hopes for the hunting ban to be repealed or weakened.⁸

It also refers to its own review of trail laying activity:

Having looked over 4,000 hunt monitoring reports of over 30 hunt monitors from different organisations covering the majority of hunts in England and Wales (157), since the Hunting Act 2004 was enacted these hunt monitors have reported witnessing someone laying a possible trail only in an average of around 3% of the occasions they monitored hunts, but they believed that only an average of around 0.04% of the occasions they may have witnessed a genuine trail hunting event, rather than a fake one.⁹

The Chair of the Countryside Alliance, Lord Herbert, has said in a January 2022 [article in Politics Home](#) that the time has come to remove hunting from the political agenda, and that this could be achieved by trail hunting operating to a high standard:

First, trail hunting must operate to a high standard and be seen as legitimate. Other sports in the public eye, such as racing, have had to adapt to maintain public confidence, and hunting must, too.

Second, politicians should, in turn, accept that trail hunting is a valid rural pastime, and that eliminating hunts through animus is not a proper political aim.¹⁰

⁷ [RSPCA, Fox Hunting \[website visited 20 April 2022\]](#)

⁸ [League Against Cruel Sport, Strengthening the Hunting Act \[website visited 20 April 2022\]](#)

⁹ [League Against Cruel Sport, Strengthening the Hunting Act \[website visited 20 April 2022\]](#)

¹⁰ [Politics Home, Is it time to ban trail and drag hunting? Lord Herbert says No, 20 January 2022](#)

1.3

Petition to stop Forestry England granting licenses for fox & hare hunts

The [full text of the petition](#), organised by [Keep the Ban](#) which campaigns to end the hunting of wildlife for sport, is as follows:

For the most recent hunting season, Forestry England gave hunting licences for 34 fox & hare “trail hunts”. Despite hunting wild mammals with dogs being illegal, two of the licensed/previously licensed trail hunts have been associated with convictions under the Hunting and Animal Welfare Acts.

Other licensed fox hunts have recently been in the press for alleged trespass, killing foxes, losing control of their dogs & for another criminal conviction. A saboteur was severely injured at a hunt in early September that ordinarily receives a licence from Forestry England.

It is only a matter of time before more convictions and more bans will have to be implemented. The answer is simple and effective – stop granting licences to hunts that are continuing to use the myth of ‘trail hunting’ to chase and kill wildlife.¹¹

The [Government response to the petition](#) dated 7 December 2020, which is available in full on the petition page, makes clear that Forestry England would continue to issue licences in the longer term, despite licences being suspended at the time:

Trail hunting in the nation's forests is currently suspended in response to confirmation that the police are investigating webinars hosted by the Hunting Office.

Forestry England has no plans to end the granting of permission for trail hunting where the hunts concerned can meet the terms and conditions of the permission which are themselves kept under regular review.

The Government will not amend the Hunting Act 2004.¹²

Forestry England (previously the Forestry Commission) does not routinely publish data on the number of licences it has issued for trail hunting. According to a [Freedom of Information request](#) (FOI), 43 licences were issued for the 2010/11 hunting season by the then Forestry Commission.

The MoD [issues](#) licences for hunting over its land. There were 21 issued in 2018/19, 26 in 2019-20, 18 in 2020/21 and 11 in 2021/22. Trail hunting used to be permitted on [National Trust](#) and [Forestry England](#) land, but licences are not currently being issued, due to concern that trail hunting was being used

¹¹ [e-petition 552017 Stop Forestry England granting licenses for Fox & Hare hunts](#)

¹² [e-petition 552017 Stop Forestry England granting licenses for Fox & Hare hunts](#)

as a cover for the hunting of mammals with hounds. Previously, the National Trust had issued 14 licences for the 2019/20 season.

The [suspension of licences by Forestry England](#) introduced in 2020 is still in place, as set out in a statement on its website:

Forestry England will not be taking any new decisions about trail hunting or hound exercise or retrieval in the nation's forests before the end of the 21/22 season [the season usually runs October to April] and our suspension of permissions for trail hunting in the nation's forests will remain.

Clean boot, or bloodhound, hunts may continue under the Masters of Draghounds and Bloodhounds Association (MDBA) permission. A clean boot hunt uses bloodhounds, rather than foxhounds, to follow human scent rather than animal scent.¹³

The [National Trust has also stopped licencing all trailing activities](#) on its land in November 2021 due to a number of reasons:

We're no longer issuing licences for any trail hunting activities, including the exercising of hounds. We're only licensing drag hunting, all other forms of hunting will not be licensed on National Trust land.

In coming to a decision on this complex, contentious issue, our Board of Trustees considered a wide range of factors, including but not limited to, the recent guilty verdict in the court case of the Masters of the Foxhounds Association, the appropriate use of charitable funds, the risk of reputational harm to the Trust, and the result of the recent members' resolution vote on this matter at our October 2021 AGM.¹⁴

In advance of the National Trust's decision, [Tim Bonner, Chief Executive of the Countryside Alliance, opposed a ban](#), stating "if the Trust were to take an ideological position against one legal activity being carried out on its land it will be opening the door to endless similar campaigns".

There has also been debate at local authority level on whether trail hunting should be banned on council owned or controlled land. A ban was recently agreed by [Cheshire West and Chester Council](#). The Countryside Alliance view on the proposal, [set out in a statement](#), was that it was "grandstanding" and "pointless".

In Wales, [Natural Resources Wales banned all trail hunting activities on its land](#) after public meeting in November 2021. In statement it set out the reasons for this as follows:

In order to assure ourselves properly that trail hunting on our estate wasn't being used as a cover for illegal activity, we would have to invest in skills and resources that we currently don't have, to police it properly. Given what has

¹³ [Forestry England, Trail hunting in the nation's forests \[website visited 20 April 2022\]](#)

¹⁴ [National Trust, Our position on trail hunting, 25 November 2021](#)

historically been a minor use of the land we manage, this does not represent good use of our limited resources.¹⁵

1.4

Petition on Mini's law: Protect the public and animals from hunting activities

The [full petition](#) calls for the introduction of a new Bill to restrict where activity with hunting hounds can take place:

In March 2021 Mini the cat was chased and killed by hunting hounds in a quiet residential area.

The Government should back Mini's Law (Public and Animal Safety Bill 2021) to ensure safety to the public and animals from hunting activity, such as trail hunts and exercise of hunting hounds.

There are many incidents involving hunting hounds and the situation is now dangerously out of control. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident with a recent report finding that as of March 2021 there is on average one reported incident every two weeks.

Legislation should be introduced to prohibit any activity involving hunting hounds, such as trail hunts and hound exercise, taking place in a residential area or in any other public place.¹⁶

[The Government response to the petition states](#) that it will not amend the Hunting Act 2004 and that there are existing powers under the [Dogs Act 1871](#) that can require a dog owner to take measures if there is evidence of a dog being dangerous and out of control:

The police can take action under the Dogs Act 1871 where dogs are out of control and dangerous to other animals. This Government will not amend the Hunting Act.

The Hunting Act 2004 makes it an offence to hunt a wild mammal with dogs except where it is carried out in accordance with the exemptions in the Act. The full details of the Hunting Act 2004 exemptions are available online at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/37/schedule/1

Those found guilty under the Act are subject to the full force of the law. Enforcement of the Hunting Act is an operational matter for the police. This Government will not amend the Hunting Act.

The police can and do take action under the Dogs Act 1871 where there are dogs that are out of control and dangerous to other animals. Section 2 of the 1871 Act allows a complaint to be made to a Magistrate's court by any individual, the police or local authorities, where a dog is "dangerous and not

¹⁵ [Natural Resources Wales, NRW stops trail hunting on its land, 18 November 2021](#)

¹⁶ [e petition 584076 Mini's law - Protect the public and animals from hunting activities](#)

kept under proper control". The court may make any Order it considers appropriate, to require the owner to keep the dog under proper control, or if necessary, that it be destroyed. The court may specify measures to be taken for keeping the dog under proper control, such as muzzling and remaining on a lead when in public.¹⁷

The [Crown Prosecution Service guidance on dangerous dog offences](#) provides further information on how the legislation is applied in practice. Following the incident where Mini was mauled, a court case resulted in a conviction under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, as [reported by BBC News](#) on 10 December 2021:

A hunt master has been found guilty of allowing a pack of hounds to kill a pet cat while she rested outside her house.

John Sampson was ordered to pay £1600 for being in charge of dogs that were dangerously out of control.

Mini the cat was mauled outside her home in Madron, Cornwall in March.

Outside Truro Magistrates Court, her owner Carly Jose said: "The complete disregard for people's animals, any animals, is just vile, utterly disturbing".

Sampson was in charge of the Western Hunt that was exercising dogs near the village, which is near Penzance.

Video showing a member of the hunt throwing the dead cat over a fence emerged online in the following days.

[...]

Sampson, 55, from St Buryan was fined £480 and ordered to pay £350 compensation to Ms Jose, £775 court costs and a £48 victim surcharge.¹⁸

Under section 3(1) of the 1991 Act, if any dog is dangerously out of control in any place, including all private property, the owner, or person for the time being in charge of the dog, is guilty of an offence, [An appeal against the conviction](#) is to be heard on 25 April 2022.

The [Keep the Ban](#) website, which campaigns to end the hunting of wildlife for sport, provides [further details of the proposal for Mini's Law](#):

- No hunting activity that uses a live animal can take place in a residential area or in any other place where a portion of the public might be.
- No hunting activity that uses a live animal can take place on public roads or footpaths.

¹⁷ [e petition 584076 Mini's law - Protect the public and animals from hunting activities](#)

¹⁸ [BBC News, Pet cat killed by pack of hunting hounds in Madron, 10 December 2021](#)

- All hunting activities that use a live animal must publish the general area where their activity will take place in advance.
- All animals used in any hunting activity must be kept under control at all times.
- All hunting activities using alive animal must be licenced by the local authority.

Examples of recent reported incidents of hunting hounds entering residential areas include [Upton in February 2022](#) and [Northampton in February 2022](#).

Existing and proposed legislation does distinguish between dogs and how they are being used. Under [section 27 of the Road Traffic Act 1988](#) it is an offence to allow a dog be on a designated road not on a lead, unless it is a working dog or being used at the time for sporting purposes.

The [Animal Welfare \(Kept Animals\) Bill](#), currently before Parliament strengthens legislation on livestock worrying. The Bill includes a provision in Clause 37 which excludes police dogs, guide dogs, trained sheep dogs, working gun dogs and packs of hounds from being covered by the definition of livestock worrying. This the same as existing provisions in the [Dogs \(Protection of Livestock\) Act 1953](#). Further details can be found in the [Commons Briefing Paper on the Bill](#).

2

Useful links

Countryside Alliance

[Prosecutions under the Hunting Act by year](#)

[Campaign for Hunting](#)

Keep the Ban campaign

[Why aren't more hunts prosecuted?](#)

RSPCA

[Fact vs. Fiction - the myths surrounding the Hunting Act](#)

The Hunting Office

[The Hunting Office: The executive arm of the governing bodies for hunting with hounds in Britain](#)

Forestry England

[Forestry England: Trail hunting in the nation's forests](#)

League Against Cruel Sports

[Strengthen the Hunting Act](#)

3

News items and press releases

Countryside Alliance press release

22 February 2022

[The Hunting Act: Seventeen years on](#)

Politics Home

20 January 2022

[Is it time to ban trail and drag hunting? Lord Herbert says No](#)

Falmouth Packet

10 December 2021

[Verdict in trial of Cornwall hunt master John Sampson after cat mauling](#)

National Trust press release

25 November 2021

[National Trust says it will no longer issue trail hunt licences](#)

i News

20 October 2021

[Police 'furious' that a member of the House of Lords was not prosecuted over fox hunting video](#)

BBC News Online

15 October 2021

[Mark Hankinson: Top huntsman guilty of encouraging illegal fox hunting](#)

The Ecologist

15 October 2021

Trail hunting is 'smokescreen'

The Times

20 September 2021

Head of foxhounds group Mark Hankinson gave advice on illegal hunts, court told

Evening Standard

25 August 2021

Hunt members cleared of breaching fox-hunting ban

ITV News Online

25 November 2020

Exclusive: Trail hunting suspended on Forestry England land

4

PQs

Hunting: Regulation

Asked by: Crosbie, Virginia

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of amending the Hunting Act to reduce the incidence of foxes being killed; and what steps he is taking to ban trail hunting on Government-owned land.

Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Our manifesto was clear that no changes will be made to the Hunting Act. The Hunting Act 2004 makes it an offence to hunt a wild mammal with dogs, except where it is carried out in accordance with the exemptions in the Act. Those found guilty under the Act are subject to the full force of the law.

Issuing a license or giving permission for trail hunting is an operational matter for the landowner and those organisations with a land lease or agreement in place for Government land.

HC Deb 03 February 2022 | PQ 114980

Hunting

Asked by: Maskell, Rachael

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring that any fox or wild animal killed in trail hunting be reported by a hunt and that that data be made accessible to the public, identifying the hunt and the number of animals.

Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Hunting Act 2004 makes it an offence to hunt a wild mammal with dogs except where it is carried out in accordance with the exemptions in the Act. The Government will not amend the Hunting Act 2004.

Those found guilty under the Act are subject to the full force of the law, and enforcement is an operational matter for the police.

HC Deb 28 January 2022 | PQ 108575

Hunting

Asked by: Norris, Alex

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the frequency of public land being used for illegal fox hunting under the guise of trail hunting; and what steps the Government is taking to ensure the effective enforcement of the prohibition on fox-hunting on public land.

Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Hunting Act 2004 makes it an offence to hunt a wild mammal with dogs except where it is carried out in accordance with the exemptions in the Act.

Those found guilty under the Act are subject to the full force of the law. As enforcement of the Hunting Act is an operational matter for the police, Defra has not assessed the frequency of offences against the Hunting Act committed on public land.

HC Deb 19 November 2021 | PQ 75987

Hunting

Asked by: Pollard, Luke

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the extent of trail hunting on privately-owned land; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

This Government has not made any assessment of the extent of trail hunting on privately owned land. The Hunting Act 2004 bans hunting of wild mammals with dogs, except where it is carried out in accordance with the exemptions in the Act.

This Government will not amend the Hunting Act. Trail hunting should not involve the pursuit of a live mammal, and if hounds do pick up the scent of a live fox during a trail hunt, it is the responsibility of the hunt staff to control the hounds and if necessary to stop them.

HC Deb 20 April 2021 | PQ 178570

Hunting: Foxes

Asked by: Sultana, Zarah

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to amend the Hunting Act 2004 to prohibit trail hunt organisers from (a) organising trail hunts in close proximity to areas of high density fox populations and (b) using animal-based scents to set trail hunts.

Answering member: Rebecca Pow | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

This government will not amend the Hunting Act 2004 and therefore we have not made any assessment of any potential amendments.

The Hunting Act 2004 makes it an offence to hunt a wild mammal with dogs except where it is carried out in accordance with the exemptions in the Act, and completely bans hare coursing. The full details of the Hunting Act 2004 exemptions are available online at:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/37/schedule/1.

Those found guilty under the Act are subject to the full force of the law. Enforcement of the Hunting Act is an operational matter for the police.

HC Deb 02 March 2021 | PQ 159045

Asked by: Luke Pollard

After the “News at Ten” exposé of foxhunters discussing how to put up the smokescreen of trail hunting when foxhunts break the law—exemptions that they describe as a “good wheeze”—is the Environment Secretary satisfied that the Hunting Act 2004 is as strong as it needs to be to stop illegal hunting? I am not.

Answered by: George Eustice | Department: Environment, food and rural affairs

The Hunting Act was brought forward by the Labour party, and there is now a consensus across this House that it should remain. Where there is a breach of that legislation, obviously the police can investigate, and they do.

Luke Pollard :

No, that is not a good enough answer. We support the strengthening of that Act and I hope that the Environment Secretary will too. Forestry England has just announced a ban on hunts using its land in response to the exposé. Should not other landowners now follow this lead and ban trail hunters from their land as well?

George Eustice :

The Government believe that the Hunting Act is sufficient. Where there are breaches, it should be enforced. It is for individual landowners to choose, as they always have done, whether they would like hunts on their land.

HC Deb 26 November 2020 | Vol 684 c971

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