

Interim Arrangements for Goose Management for Winter 1999/2000

Current goose management schemes

When the National Goose Forum was first set up, Ministers recognised the intended national policy framework would take time to put in place. They accordingly asked SNH to continue with those pilot schemes which it considered justified in particular parts of Scotland for the winters of 1997-98 and 1998-99. During the winter of 1998-99 SNH participated actively in goose management regimes in four areas in Scotland:

- The Islay Voluntary Goose Management Scheme (IVGMS)
- The Solway Barnacle Goose Management Scheme (BGMS)
- The South Walls Goose Management Scheme in Orkney
- The Uists Goose Management Committee.

The need for further interim arrangements

SNH regards the present arrangements for goose management across Scotland as unsatisfactory in several respects, most notably in their lack of a coherent policy framework and in their inequitable treatment of farmers experiencing similar impacts in different parts of Scotland. It had hoped that the new arrangements would have been implemented by the winter of 1999/2000 and has operated the current schemes over the past winter very much in the expectation that this would be their final year. It regrets therefore that it is proving necessary to continue with this essentially interim regime for yet another winter.

SNH recognises, however, that The Scottish Office feels that several factors have conspired to leave it with no choice but to extend the present arrangements for another winter. These include:

- The impending court hearing as a result of RSPB and WWT' s petition for a judicial review of SOAEFD' s decision to issue licences to shoot geese within the SPAs on Islay has been postponed until late September. The outcome of this case may have implications for the advice to be provided to Ministers by the NGF, so any advice provided before then will necessarily be provisional in character. In addition, it is by no means certain that the case will conclude with the first judgement.
- The advent of the Scottish Parliament and the change in responsibilities from Ministers at The Scottish Office to Ministers in the Scottish Executive is likely to delay any decision based on the advice of the NGF.
- The generic management scheme developed by the NGF sub-group will require further refinement before it is ready for implementation.
- There is uncertainty as to the timescale over which any changes could be made to UK and EU legislation which may be necessary to implement the NGF' s proposals.
- The complexity of the modelling exercises required to establish the degree of risk to the future viability of individual goose species associated with different population levels.

Proposals for interim arrangements

Because of the delay in the implementation of the national policy framework SNH proposes to maintain its involvement in goose management in the four areas mentioned earlier, as follows:

Islay Voluntary Goose Management Scheme (IVGMS)

The IVGMS will continue to operate in winter 1999/2000 as it did in winter 1998/99. This will involve management payments to farmers and crofters who enter the scheme in proportion to the level of goose usage on their inbye fields. Farmers and crofters who join the scheme must agree not to scare geese off their fields, with the exception of recent reseeded.

SNH is aware that there are various possible ways of modelling the economic damage caused by geese, and that the exercise undertaken a few years ago suggested this might be between £14 and £32 per goose depending on the assumptions used in the modelling process. However, there has always been some debate about the validity of the model and resources have never been available to permit payments to be made at these levels. In these circumstances SNH has felt obliged to set the payment level at a lower

figure but has sought to ensure that the funds available were distributed as equitably as possible. Over the past three winters it has progressively increased the payment level per goose from £9 to £10.70. The increase for the 1998/99 winter was made possible by recycling into the scheme the funds that previously went into a number of management agreements concluded in the late 1980s (before the introduction of the IVGMS) to safeguard some of the core feeding areas. The total amount that SNH paid towards goose management on Islay thus remained the same as in the previous winter but the basis of distribution changed. When it discussed the issue at its May meeting, the Main Board of SNH decided that it would be appropriate to allocate the same level of funds to goose management on Islay for the 1999/2000 winter. The precise payment per goose would thus once more depend on the numbers that were present through the winter. These remained broadly the same between the 1997/98 and 1998/99 winters, so there is at least a possibility that the level of payment per goose on this cash-limited basis will remain largely unchanged.

Quite apart from the financial constraints under which SNH operates, Board members felt that they could not justify increasing payments under IVGMS at a time when farmers in some other parts of Argyll (and indeed elsewhere) were also accommodating large numbers of geese on their land without any form of special financial support.

One of the other issues which has been raised by farmers and crofters on Islay is the method of counting geese on fields. SNH intends to reconsider the way in which the assessment is made of goose usage of individual fields to address farmers' concerns.

Solway Barnacle Goose Management Scheme (BGMS)

SNH intends to extend the BGMS on the Solway for winter 1999/2000 on very much the same basis as it has operated for the last few years. This is consistent with the generally favourable assessment of the scheme arrived at by the NGF sub-group which studied schemes. It is anticipated that those farmers who joined the scheme last year will wish to participate again this winter. However, as the Objective 5b funding which SNH has received in the past for this scheme is no longer available, it seems probably that SNH will have to bear the full cost of the scheme for winter 1999/2000.

South Walls Goose Management Scheme

Although this pilot scheme was due to finish at the end of winter 1998/99, SNH proposes to continue with it for the winter of 1999/2000, although it was due to finish at the end of winter 1998/1999. The main features of this scheme will be the same as over the last few years, namely:

- Agreements will be made with three farmers to encourage re-seeds, and appropriate treatments and additional fertiliser applications on agreed feeding refuge areas.
- Agreements will be made with about 14 farmers with land outside the refuge areas to allow shepherding of geese onto these refuge areas.
- A 'goose shepherd' will be employed to ensure the geese use the refuge areas as opposed to other areas of inbye.
- A contract will be let to undertake monitoring of the agricultural effects of the scheme.

The one change will be that annual monitoring of the pattern of goose usage will be discontinued as it is felt that this is no longer needed on an annual basis because there is now enough information for SNH to be confident that the refuge-and-scaring system works on South Walls.

It is proposed that the level of payments offered for winter 1999/2000 will be the same as in 1998/99.

Uists

The role of the Goose Management Committee in North Uist and South Uist include participating in regular goose counts, co-ordinating the activities of the estate's shooting parties with the need for crofters to prevent damage, monitoring numbers shot, providing advice on scaring techniques and providing assistance for scaring devices. SNH contributes to the cost of these arrangements and will continue to do so for winter 1999/2000 on a similar basis to before.

Conclusions

SNH regrets the fact that it has not proved possible to put a new policy framework and generic goose management scheme in place for the 1999/2000 winter. It would still like to see them adopted and implemented as soon as possible and believes that the priority for the immediate future should be to achieve this. In these circumstances it is reluctant to make more than nominal changes to the present arrangements, particularly as these already discriminate to a degree which is very hard to justify between farmers facing similar problems in different parts of Scotland. It is for these reasons that SNH proposes rolling forward the current schemes largely unaltered.

**Scottish Natural Heritage,
May 1999.**