



NEWS RELEASE

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CROFTERS CLAIM CHEMICAL BAN FUELS WILDFIRE RISK

A decision by the European Union to ban asulam, one of the most cost effective and selective chemicals available to crofters for bracken control, will worsen the risk of devastating spring wildfires, the Scottish Crofting Federation have warned.

The rationale for the ban, announced by the EU's European Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) this week, is a concern over the chemical's safety when used on spinach and other food crops. However, an outright ban on asulam, which is the active ingredient in Asulox, has deprived crofters of the right to use Asulox for bracken control. The argument put forward by the SCF is that this will increase the spread of bracken, whose stranglehold across swathes of the Highlands is already being exacerbated by climate change and the loss of stock from the hills.

The SCF add that dead bracken was undoubtedly a major factor in the wildfires that raged through the north-west in the spring of this year, when the residue of last year's growth had become light brown and tinder dry. Although the SCF had appealed to both the Scottish and UK Government to try to ensure that any ban would apply to the use of asulox on food crops only, yesterday's decision by SCoFCAH means that the treatment will be withdrawn from sale at the end of this year and cannot be used for bracken control after December 2012.

Eleanor Arthur SCF Chair says "Crofters will recognise the seriousness of this situation. The introduction of the single farm payment (SFP) in the last CAP reform created an exodus of animals from the hills, especially sheep, which has left large swathes of land abandoned. Active crofters are now struggling to control bracken on underused hills and are being penalised because undergrazing has resulted in areas infested by bracken being removed from their SFP. It is bitterly disappointing that the EU now remove the most effective method, other than grazing, of trying to control the spread of bracken."

END

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