



WATERFOWL SHOOTING AND SEVERE WEATHER

VOLUNTARY RESTRAINT

The procedures for the introduction by government of a statutory suspension of the shooting of ducks, geese and waders (including woodcock and snipe), coot and moorhen*, normally include a call by the BASC for voluntary restraint from day seven of 'severe weather' up to the time when any statutory suspension takes effect. In order to avoid misunderstanding about what is meant by "voluntary restraint", and, after consideration by BASC's Wildfowling Committee, this paper gives guidance on the subject.

It should be recognised that the period of voluntary restraint is an essential element in the now well-established severe weather procedure, this provides a strong argument against pressures to shorten the trigger period preceding statutory suspensions. Typically, when voluntary restraint has been called in a winter, the shooting community has subsequently been praised for showing its responsibility in this way. Furthermore, the demonstration of action having been taken before a statutory suspension can be most helpful in ensuring appropriate flexibility when the subsequent lifting of such suspensions is being considered by the organisations involved.

It should be emphasised that it is a voluntary restraint, and not a voluntary suspension of shooting, that is sought by the BASC. This is not to say, however, that a suspension may not be the most appropriate course of action. The need for voluntary restraint can only be determined at a local level and no hard and fast rules can be established since conditions and needs vary so much around the country. Wildfowling and game shooters are best placed to consider all the factors relevant to their particular locality and to decide what is most appropriate under the circumstances.

As to the practicalities of appropriate action during a period of voluntary restraint, we urge wildfowling clubs, game shoots and other shooters to consider the following points. Moreover, these matters should be considered at the earliest opportunity so that each club or shoot can agree the course of action which it will take, should it be necessary in the future.

* For information on the statutory suspension procedures please see BASC information sheet "Waterfowl shooting and severe weather – statutory suspension".

Who takes the decisions?

Clubs and shoots need to consider carefully who takes the decisions on what action is appropriate during a period of voluntary restraint. Monitoring of the situation will be needed and this might well involve, for example, marsh wardens reporting regularly to the committee on the prevailing conditions of both birds and marsh.

How are the members informed?

Clubs and shoots should consider, ahead of the shooting season, how they will inform their members and non-club permit holders, of any decision. This will be particularly important for those travelling considerable distances for their shooting. Potential means of communication include telephone, social media, emails, text messages, local newspapers and radio stations, as well as notices posted at access points to the marsh. Club committees and shoots should also consider what liaison with other wildfowling clubs or shoots would be appropriate at these times, together with the degree of any coordinated action with neighbouring groups which might be appropriate. Again, agreement over consultation procedures at an early stage would help ensure that any lines of communication work smoothly when they are required.

What action is appropriate?

Clubs and shoots may find the following points helpful in enabling them to decide what action is appropriate during a period of voluntary restraint. Such actions may be as a response to only small changes in bird behaviour, which may require only some reduction of disturbance to birds during that period, up to conditions of very difficult feeding which might require a total (voluntary) suspension of shooting in the locality. Problems which may arise from possible large numbers of wildfowling using the marshes and practical difficulties in wardening may also need to be considered in some localities.

The appearance of unusual species and influxes of unusual numbers of waterfowl often suggest conditions hardening over a wide area. Tameness and other abnormal behaviour often follow, perhaps presenting opportunities for excessive bags. Appropriate responses might be to introduce bag limits or reduce those which already exist.

Increasing evidence of birds under stress, particularly coupled with high winds (the wind chill factor being a key element in how much energy birds expend in order to keep warm) might lead to time limits on shooting, so as to help birds conserve energy and have periods of undisturbed feeding.

Any signs of loss of body condition, freezing foreshores, ponds and lakes, and/or total snow cover on saltmarsh or inland feeding grounds might be thought enough to warrant a local suspension of shooting until such time as the birds have recovered.

It should be borne in mind that after particularly hard and/or prolonged severe weather it might be appropriate for clubs and shoots to phase in normal shooting levels, even after a statutory suspension has formally ended, if local conditions still warrant it.

It may also be appropriate to take action if your shooting, though unaffected itself by local severe conditions, is adjacent to an area more badly affected, such that birds are taking refuge on your land while the difficult conditions persist.

Throughout any period of voluntary restraint and subsequent statutory suspensions wildfowling clubs and game shoots have the opportunity to demonstrate through the local media their responsible attitude to management of their shooting.

Finally, clubs and shoots are asked to maintain close liaison with their BASC Country or Regional Centre over any actions which they take. It is most important that your Association is fully abreast of the situation around the country when consulting with government and other parties involved in the severe weather arrangements.

If there are any aspects of the severe weather arrangements for waterfowl shooting you would like to discuss, then please get in touch with:

Office	Tel. no.	Email address
BASC Head Office	01244 573000	wildfowling@basc.org.uk
BASC Scotland	01350 723226	scotland@basc.org.uk
BASC Wales	01244 573029	wales@basc.org.uk
Northern England	01244 573040	northern@basc.org.uk
Central	01283 810910	central@basc.org.uk
Eastern	01283 810910	eastern@basc.org.uk
South East England	01244 573028	southeast@basc.org.uk
South West England	01884 260910	southwest@basc.org.uk
BASC Northern Ireland	02892 605050	nire@basc.org.uk