

# 2024 Highlight Report

## About us

The Scottish Countryside Alliance is the political campaigning force that promotes and protects the rural way of life, representing the interests of our members, supporters and rural communities in parliament, in the media and on the ground. We cannot be as effective as we are in our campaigning work without the continued support we receive.

We actively campaign to engage Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) from all political parties, advocating for our members' rights and interests during parliamentary meetings and committee sessions. Our efforts involve collaboration with partner organisations and government bodies to ensure fair and unbiased treatment for our members.

An election is expected to be called in the Scottish Parliament in 2026, so we are preparing for this now. This highlight report provides an overview of the main issues which we have been campaigning for over the last year and will outline the main areas we will be looking at for 2025, which will shape our campaigning strategy for the 2026 election.



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# Our objectives

## Sustainable rural community

We want our members and supporters to be able to live and work in rural areas without barriers. We continue to lobby our parliament on issues such as rural transport networks, broadband connectivity, rural depopulation, the cost-of-living crisis, and fuel poverty. Growth is key.

## Challenge misinformation and bias

Our team will challenge misinformation and bias in the press, when appropriate, and will always promote the benefits of rural living in a positive way. We will always support our farmers and campaign against extreme veganism and animal rights extremism. We are proud of our farmers and food producers and the work they do to provide healthy nutritious produce.

## Environmental stewardship

We remain actively involved in legislation including hunting with dogs, wildlife management and muirburn, and land reform. Our team keeps abreast of all the latest rural matters for our members and is active on a number of political and practical advisory committees.

## Public benefit

We provide guidance and help to our members on issues affecting their rural way of life. From lobbying MSPs to providing professional guidance on firearms licensing and applying for NatureScot wildlife licences.

# Our key messages

## Hunting

The 3 October 2024 marked the one-year anniversary of the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act enactment. The SCA worked with members to ensure that the licensing scheme provided for in the Act, and administered by NatureScot, was fit for purpose and adhered to the parameters contained within the legislation, as passed.

With the continued assistance of our members, we have successfully engaged with NatureScot and the Scottish Government to streamline the hunting with dogs licensing process, allowing wildlife management organisations to carry out essential operations across Scotland.

## Deer management

The SCA has been invited to collaborate on a new Ministerial Forum that will look at our wildlife in Scotland and how we manage it in the future. Deer will be a focus for us, given the proposed, intrusive changes to the Deer Management Plans (DMP's) that the Scottish Government wish to enforce. Welfare should be considered above all else.

## Shooting

The Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill became an Act on 30 April 2024. The SCA was involved in the various stages of the Bill to ensure the proposed licensing schemes would be workable and fit for purpose.

The licensing scheme for taking red grouse has been in place since 15 July 2024. The wildlife trap licence will be introduced in early 2025, subject to an announcement from the Scottish Government. Training is already underway, and the SCA was part of the small team that developed this course.

We also continue our work on the Firearms Licensing and Explosives Group to seek changes in legislation to remove moderators from firearm certificates and to support the justification for 10-year licences.



# Rural communities

During 2024, we gave evidence to the **Land Reform Bill** consultations and engaged in an evidence session in Holyrood for the Bill. We made our position clear that we fully support community engagement under the Bill, but whatever changes are made should not be to the detriment of the rural sector when selling or letting land for sale. This Bill should not create unnecessary barriers.

The **Agricultural and Rural Communities Act** provides a framework for Scottish Ministers to support agriculture, rural communities and the rural economy, including through the facilitation of on-farm nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation. Venison and game meat (farmed and wild) businesses are recognised in the Act as food producers, thus allowing these businesses access to funding and grants. SCA campaigning aided in this process.

The **Circular Economy Bill** became an Act on 8 August 2024. During the consultation phase of the Bill the SCA responded to questions on household waste, fly-tipping, and littering from vehicles. Our organisation has long been actively campaigning for tighter controls into fly-tipping and littering from vehicles.

The proposed **Heat in Buildings Bill** will provide for a new Heat in Buildings Standard. We are engaging with parliamentarians on this Bill as it will have potential implications for our rural residents, due to difficulties with poorly insulated homes and the expense and necessary technical expertise required to install and manage new clean heating systems in remote and isolated areas of Scotland.

The **New Build Heat Standard** was introduced on 1 April 2024, effectively banning the installation of wood-burning stoves in new build homes and conversions. We spoke to the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, Jim Fairlie, about the concerns of rural residents and raised our view that the proposed legislation surrounding wood burning stoves needed to be reconsidered. In December 2024, the Scottish Government reversed their decision to ban wood-burning stoves.

The SCA recently responded to a consultation on the **Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Members Bill**. This Bill seeks to implement five days of outdoor education for every schoolchild from P6 – S3. We will continue to consult on this Bill and support its progress through Parliament.

# Our next chapter

Our ongoing campaign work over the last year will continue to develop over the coming months, and our team will monitor any rural legislation that will directly impact our members and supporters.

We continue to engage with the Scottish Government over proposed deer management legislation relating to deer numbers. We ask for proper incentivisation and venison marketing as well as legislation that reflects deer management operations being recognised as an important part of the government net zero plans.

NatureScot and the Scottish Government are developing new ways of regulating activities, such as full cost recovery for all wildlife management licences, as well as firearms licensing. We will work with ministers to help shape legislation so that it is proportionate and fair.

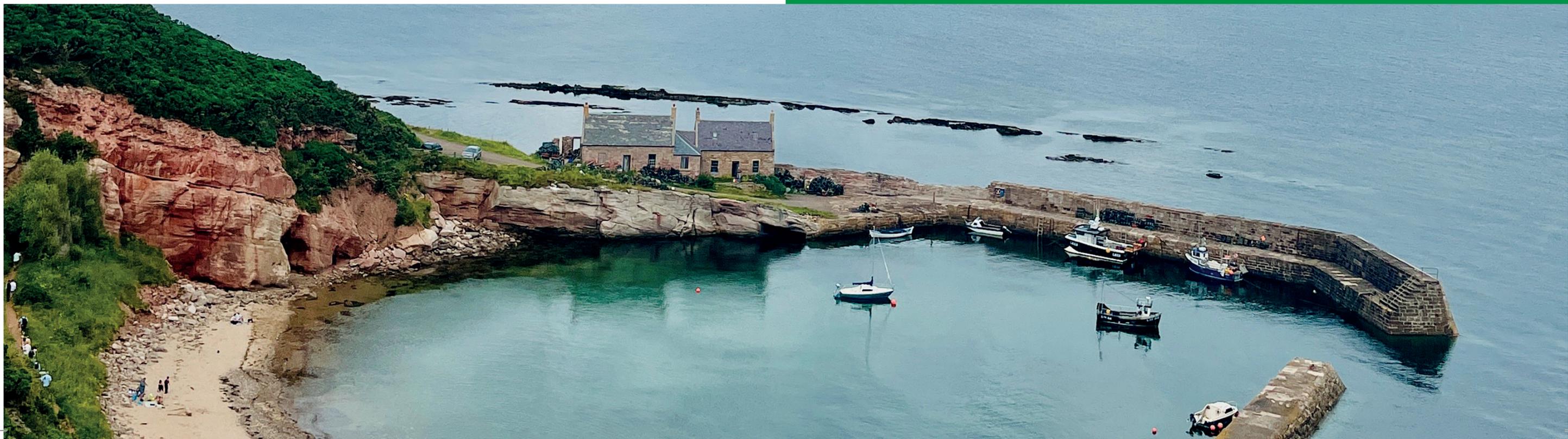
The SCA will work with officials to secure a workable hunting with dogs licensing system. We will continue to hold both NatureScot and the Scottish Government to account until what was passed in the Act is delivered.

We are working to support and promote a number of wader projects across Scotland.

Over the next 12 months, our team will engage with decision-makers to advance rural issues to the forefront of the parliamentary agenda. We will push back on adverse legislation, ensuring that rural policies are on an equal footing with central belt politics. Our team are working hard to ensure the interests of our members are properly represented.



Keep up to date with all our news and subscribe to our monthly Heather Routes newsletter.



## Join today

We sincerely thank you for your support over the past 12 months, but we must remember that our opponents are very well-funded, and we must ensure we have the necessary resources to continue our important campaigning work in Scotland. We need to keep rural issues at the forefront and ensure our rural communities are not forgotten. Help us fight these real political threats to our rural way of life and join the Countryside Alliance today.



## Membership benefits

- Public Liability cover up to £15 million covering shooting, hunting and many other rural activities
- A convenient digital membership card
- Access to dedicated experts in our core campaign fields
- Exclusive updates and insights on our work to protect rural communities
- Our membership magazine, *My Countryside*, filled with expert insights and updates.



## Member quotes

Thank you to the Countryside Alliance for having your finger on the pulse of the countryside and our heritage. Keep doing what you are doing so well in the stormy times ahead.

Ei W

I've now been a member of the Alliance for many years and remember vividly attending a Hyde Park rally. The Alliance has been our leading light, and long may that continue!

Philip V

The Countryside Alliance represents all of us who care about country sports and other issues affecting country dwellers. Without them we would have no big voice in the wider world - long may it continue!

Janie C

