



# Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP  
Secretary of State Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

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By email only

1 March 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write again following my announcement of 1 February where I explained our approach to gamebird release on Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and their buffer zones for 2024.

Firstly, I do recognise the challenge and pressure that the sector has been under and very much value the rural sports community and the important benefits they bring to conservation. I also understand it is important that we give as much certainty as we can to businesses, and as such I wanted to let you know as soon as I could about the forthcoming licensing decision.

I can confirm that the national highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) risk level of transmission in wild birds remains at medium and we are working towards issuing a general licence for selected SPAs, with appropriate conditions attached, for gamebird release in 2024. I hope that this new general licence will provide greater freedom for those shoots operating on the selected SPAs to release birds without the need to apply for an individual licence.

My officials continue to work at pace to complete our assessments and are seeking statutory nature conservation advice to finalise the general licence. We therefore aim to publish the new general licence in mid-March at which point I will write to you again.

We have shared our draft individual licence application form and guidance with organisations that have an interest in gamebird releases, seeking feedback before they are published. In addition, we have shared proposed draft conditions that may be applied in the general licence, such as biosecurity measures that would help to reduce the risk of spreading HPAI from gamebirds to internationally protected wild birds throughout 2024. We will draw on stakeholders' expertise to ensure that our licensing process can be easily followed, and that our licences are practical to use whilst ensuring the internationally protected wild bird species and features present on the SPAs are shielded from the risk of transmission of HPAI from the released gamebirds.

I am also pleased to announce that once the general licence has been published, my officials will schedule calls with those that need to apply for an individual licence and those that can use the general licence to talk through the process and take questions.

If you have further queries about arrangements for the 2024 season, please contact my officials at [GLEnquiries@defra.gov.uk](mailto:GLEnquiries@defra.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steve', with a stylized flourish above the name.

**RT HON STEVE BARCLAY MP**