



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 February 2024

Dear Sir / Madam,

As Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs I wanted to write to you personally regarding gamebird licensing for 2024.

Firstly, I want to confirm that Defra will remain the licensing authority for the release of gamebirds on, or near, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Natural England will remain as the licensing authority for Individual Licences for Special Areas of Conservation.

I am pleased to announce our approach to gamebird release on SPAs and their buffers for 2024, to give as much notice as possible to stakeholders of our direction of travel. Where the evidence supports the decision, I propose to issue a general licence for a duration of 12 months, with appropriate additional conditions attached for gamebird release. This approach is on the basis that the national highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) risk level of transmission for wild birds remains at medium. My officials are working through each SPA now to determine which SPAs are suitable for inclusion in the new general licence. Releases on or near SPAs that are not covered by the new general licence would continue to require an individual licence.

I have asked the Chief Scientific Adviser to keep the risk level under review. Should the risk level fall from medium to low, we will be prepared to respond quickly to the implications. This may mean, for example, that more SPAs could be covered by a general licence. But before I can take a final decision, the habitats regulations process must be completed so that I can rule out any adverse impacts from the release of gamebirds on internationally protected species present on the SPAs.

We aim to share details of the new general and individual licence process for SPAs by the end of February.

I understand that the shooting season is coming to an end and shoots on or near an SPA will want to start planning in earnest for the 2024 season. Please bear with us whilst we finalise the details of the licensing arrangements for 2024. As advised previously, I would be grateful if shoots operating on or near SPAs could adapt their normal planning processes and

recommend that gamebirds are not ordered until this announcement has been made.

My officials are continuing to work with organisations with an interest in gamebird releases, and we are grateful for their contributions in helping us improve the design and delivery of gamebird licensing for 2024. If you have further queries about arrangements for the 2024 season, please contact my officials at GLEnquiries@defra.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steve', is centered on the page.

RT HON STEVE BARCLAY MP