

REF: 2015S40/0043

From:

Sent: 07 January 2015 16:39

To: Nature Conservation

Subject: Review of Section 40

Re Review of Section 40

Hedge Cutting

Should the closed period for cutting hedges be changed? NO

Burning of Vegetation:

Burning should not be allowed unless under strict control and for reasons deemed to benefit biodiversity.

Comments:

There is not enough protection given to wildlife in Ireland and not enough rangers to enforce the law as it stands. The National Parks and Wildlife Service is completely under resourced. Hedge cutting exemptions give landowners, county councils and developers free rein to carry out hedge cutting and scrub removal in the name of health and safety, normal agricultural practices or road construction. I've lost count of the number of times during the closed season I've stopped on the road to suggest to people that it wasn't appropriate to cut hedges at that time, or seen scrub being removed en masse from hillside fields.

So much cover has been removed in recent years that we're seeing the knock on effect of excess run-off into rivers causing flooding downstream. More trees/hedges should be planted to stabilize land especially as rainfall amounts are predicted to increase. Also, trees lock up CO<sub>2</sub>, some of which was dumped into the atmosphere by the wilful uncontrollable burning of large tracts of scrub land, especially of concern to homeowners living nearby who fear for their safety and that of their homes.

Hedgerows are necessary for many species as habitats and as corridors to pass from area to area. Also of concern is the effect of hedge removal on animal welfare. If, with the change in laws governing milk quotas, the national dairy herd is going to increase, will this lead to more and more hedges being removed to cater for larger herds and increased silage and grain production? Even if landowners have no real concern for wildlife surely they know that their animals still need protection from the weather? Mature hedgerows, which afford wonderful shelter, should be retained out of necessity. However, as many of the 'managed' hedges across Ireland have been flailed almost to death and are often bare at the bottom, these should be in filled with young plants to ensure that they remain of value.

Pollinators are under threat worldwide from loss of habitat and effects of sprays. Insects need nectar but look around the countryside and, apart from private gardens and hedgerows, you will see very little in the way of flowers. There are few meadows left, just hectares of sterile reseeded pasture, useless for our pollinators. Field headlands should be wide, allowed to remain fallow and not ploughed right up to the boundary, allowing for wild plants to grow, bloom and provide much needed food for pollinators and other beneficial insects.

Why is it that landowners and multinational chemical companies touting sprays can carry on without proving that their actions are not damaging our long term health and that of our natural environment? It's as if the countryside is being used as one big experiment. The onus should not be

on small environmental charities and concerned individuals to prove that these actions are detrimental. Just because a government is only in office for a short time does not mean that it should neglect the long term welfare of the nation and its environment. What about the future generations?

It has been proven time and time again that access to the outdoors and a connection with wildlife can improve a person's well-being. In a time of increased awareness of mental health and rising obesity levels, it makes sense to look after our natural environment. We shouldn't feel obliged to protect wildlife and the environment because 'Europe' says so, but because we believe they're an important part of who we are, and are necessary for our wellbeing and economic recovery.

Yours faithfully,