

REF: 2015S40/069

From:

Sent: 09 January 2015 08:01

To: Nature Conservation

Subject: Public Consultation Submission

Dear Minister,

With regard to the review on hedgecutting and burning controls, I am totally opposed to any changes in the hedgecutting open season. Because of climate change especially in a year like this with such a mild winter the nesting season of many birds has actually been earlier and any change in legislation will impact further on our declining farmland bird population. If anything, the season should be brought forward 2 weeks to allow for this. Maintaining the existing controls will send out a positive signal to the general public and especially to our food consumers abroad that we are taking our biodiversity and climate change obligations seriously. I would also add that Teagasc research has indicated that mature hedgerows have the capacity to remove up to 3tCO₂/hectare per year. Flailing and sawing of hedgerows should be banned except for dangerous bends and sight lines at dwelling entrances. They should be allowed to grow to blossom and fruit and reduce the carbon footprint and only side-trimmed to prevent encroachment onto food production areas. 6 months is adequate time for any hedgerow controls that need to be undertaken.

Likewise burning will increase the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere at a time when the world is trying to reduce its carbon footprint. Burning vegetation is not a natural phenomenon in this country and sends out the wrong signal to the public at a time when backyard burning is outlawed and we are legally obliged to reduce our own carbon footprint. The hen harrier is a protected species and is in serious decline because of afforestation. Burning off scrub and heather will impact further on this beautiful threatened bird, destroying the habitat it requires for breeding and feeding. Can we afford to pay the fines from Europe if this bird declines further?

As a small dairy farmer I would hope that in time I will be paid for having a biodiversity-rich farm (this payment for biodiversity has already commenced in the Netherlands). Sending out the wrong message to the food consumer will impact on our image both at home and abroad - we are in the premium food market not the lower-end commodity market.

Please take my concerns on board and make improvements for the long term and for the wider community and also and most importantly for our children coming after us.