

Ref: 2015S40/123

Sent: 09 January 2015 16:31

To: Nature Conservation

Subject: Consultation on hedgerows and uplands

To whom it may concern:

In relation to the consultation on hedgerow cutting and upland burning I would like to give my views. Our hedgerows are a hugely important for wildlife (habitat, food sources, migratory corridor) and for people (stock control, nature and heritage appreciation, boundaries, carbon sequestration, nectar source for honey production)- important ecosystem services. Any decision on changes to cutting times should be based on up-to-date scientific evidence. Observations on changes of bird behaviour which could include earlier nesting and increased broods due to milder temperatures should be also taken into account. I am not in a position to suggest date changes and would leave these to wildlife experts but believe that any changes should absolutely not be to the detriment of wildlife.

In relation to upland burning, again science should be used to determine the answers here. I have seen some research supporting limited burning for certain species (grouse). Many of our uplands are Special Areas of Conservation and are host to protected species. Great care is needed if upland burning is to be allowed to ensure that these internationally protected habitats and species are managed appropriately and to maintain good status or increase their status from bad/inadequate as reported in the Article 17 reports. As a hiker in the uplands I have noticed in some areas an increase in woody vegetation but think that supporting farmers to graze these lands appropriately in a traditional manner is more favourable than burning.

For both subjects, the lack of enforcement of the current laws is derisory. I have witnessed many times around the country hedgerows being cut at inappropriate times. On some occasions I cannot see the potential safety issue, it seems arbitrary. Who does one call on these occasions? In relation to uplands the spate of upland fires in the hot, late Spring a few years ago serves to remind us of the costly reality of out-of-control fires.

Separately, there needs to be more education generally on hedgecutting directed towards the general public/landowners, hedgecutters and contractors. When I was growing up in rural County Limerick there were robust hedgerows all around. Now, hedges are clipped every year with very few tall trees/shrubs standing for bird perches and food supply. This is not limited to Limerick either. When was it decided to tidy up and open up the countryside? I believe that **hedgerow management** should be the modus operandi not hedgerow cutting. This management would determine the health of the hedgerow and what actions need to be taken for a defined goal (wildlife, safety, stock control).

Yours sincerely,