

Muirburn payments to create grazing for Red Deer in the Cairngorms National Park

Description

- 73 The Working Group recommends that the current references to deer from the Muirburn Code be removed and replaced with a reference to muirburn for wild deer through its Rural Burn Management Climate Scheme.**
- 74 The Working Group recommends that the Muirburn Code be amended to make it an offence to carry out muirburn in areas of Scottish Natural Heritage.**

Extract from Deer Working Group report

Until reading the Report of the Deer Working Group (DWG) to the Scottish Government ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)), I had not realised that the Scottish Government was dishing out public money to landowners to undertake muirburn for red deer. The payments appear to have been introduced by the Scottish Government in 2015 and then, in 2017 the Muirburn Code ([see here](#)) was revised to include for the first time reference to burning for Red Deer. The justification for this is to provide “*greater short-term grazing capacity*” and to “*attract deer to specific areas*”. The revised Muirburn Code was officially approved by the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Roseanna Cunningham.

The section in the DWG report that covers muirburn for red deer ([see here for extract](#)) concludes that it is even more damaging than muirburn for grouse. This is because the larger fires burn hotter and destroy more peat, hence the recommendations above.

The DWG recommendations are admirable for their clarity of purpose in contrast to the recommendations of the Werritty Review where landowners were given a veto ([see here](#)). Werritty makes no criticism to make of the Muirburn Code and assumes that muirburn-related payments to landowners should continue:

“That SNH and Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate (RPID) should be given power and resources to monitor adherence to the Muirburn Code by any land manager carrying out muirburn, whether or not they are in receipt of muirburn-related support payments”.

The Scottish Government should ignore Werritty on this and listen to the DWG.

Payments to landowners for muirburn to improve grazing

The DWG Report stated there is no specific data on Rural Payments for Muirburn for Red Deer. This appears to be because payments for “Muirburn and Heather Cutting” ([see here](#)) can be made to “improve” BOTH deer and livestock grazing. I nevertheless thought it worth asking the Rural Payments Division for all payments made within the Cairngorms National Park from 2015 to the present.

Despite emailing the wrong address, I was very impressed when I received the reply just 8 days after making the request and an hour and a half after receiving an official acknowledgement. Brilliant service and much appreciated! Would that all information requests were responded to similarly.....

Here is the extract from the spreadsheet I received:

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Area Office	Business Name	2017	2018	2019	2020
Inverness	Redacted	£76.68	£76.68	£76.68	
Inverness	Tulchan Sporting Estates	£3,373.92	£3,373.92	£3,373.92	
Thainstone	A Smith & Son	£6,134.80	£6,134.80	£6,134.80	
Thainstone	C Downie & Son		£76.68	£330.49	
Elgin	Delnabo Estate Ltd		£2,300.40	£1,150.20	
Perth	Balvarran Estate	£843.48			
Inverness	J & M McConnachie & Son	£4,600.80	£4,600.80	£4,600.80	
Elgin	Lesmurdie Farms		£1,150.20	£1,150.20	
Inverness	Badenedon		£76.68	£76.68	
Thainstone	Finzean Estate Partnership		£460.08		
Perth	Lednathie Estate Ltd		£1,111.86		
Elgin	Ballindalloch Home Farms		£4,984.20	£9,968.40	
Perth	Balnabroich Farms		£690.12	£613.44	
Perth	West Tempar Enterprises		£127.29	£111.18	
Elgin	Glenavon Estate Ltd		£1,993.68	£920.16	£2,300.40
Inverness	Redacted		£1,533.60		
Inverness	K McKenzie & Sons			£613.44	
Perth	Astel Ltd			£632.61	
		£15,029.68	£28,690.99	£29,753.00	£2,300.40

Where payments have been made to individuals, the names have been redacted.

The FOI response stated that NO payments were made for muirburn and heather cutting within the Cairngorms National Park in 2015 and 2016. The data tells you that while the number and amount of payments since 2017 have been relatively small, they have been increasing.

While there are some small payments to farms, I was struck by the £9,968.40 paid last year to Ballindalloch Home Farms, which appears to be part of the Ballindalloch Estate ([see here](#)) on the north side of the National Park. At £67 a hectare that means the taxpayer paid the estate to burn 148 ha of moorland. Then there are the three payments of the £3,373 to Tulchan Sporting Estates, which appears to be the Tulchan Estate on the north side of the National Park which was sold in 2017 to a Russian billionaire ([see here](#)). Are these payments to large landowners really in the public interest?

The two biggest ecological challenges faced by the Cairngorms National Park are overgrazing and muirburn. Yet the Scottish Government is dishing out money under the Agri-Environment and Climate Change scheme to promote both in an area which has a statutory duty to put conservation first! The failure of government to take a joined up approach is striking.

According to the Rural Payments website, the scheme for "Muirburn and Heather Cutting", which was originally scheduled to run between 2015-2020, is now no longer open to new entrants. That is something, but the Scottish Government has continued to make these payments despite its declaration of a Climate Emergency a year ago and its not clear if a new version of the scheme will become

available in due course or not.

What needs to happen

The Scottish Government needs to stop ALL rural payments that promote burning immediately. How burning is then regulated will take longer to sort out but the message should be clear, neither large numbers of red deer nor muirburn are compatible with the restoration of woodland and peatland.

Having started to look at Rural Payments in our National Parks, its clear that there are other payments being made to landowners which damage conservation. While this is an issue across Scotland, its a particular issue in our National Parks and other protected areas where conservation is supposed to come first.

Now we are out of the EU and no longer constrained by the Common Agricultural Policy – which has done so much damage to wildlife through promoting agricultural intensification ([see here](#)) – there is NO reason why we shouldn't design a different system of land support fit for our National Parks. While the £30k a year on muirburn is a small amount on the scheme of things, it could have been used to prevent damage rather than causing it – for example paying for an extra full-time stalker.

One way to achieve this would be for the Scottish Government to pool ALL rural payments made under the agri-environment scheme in the Cairngorms National Park. It could then ask the CNPA to administer this pot in ways that promote the Park's conservation objectives. (In principle, the same could happen in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park but that would require them to develop a proper conservation team instead of devoting so much of their resources to policing campers).

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. climate change
2. CNPA
3. conservation
4. Deer
5. Freedom of Information
6. landed estates
7. LLTNPA
8. muirburn
9. Scottish Government

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Author

nickkempe