

Defra responds to Wild Justice challenge: releasing gamebirds on protected sites

The way in which the release of gamebirds on or near protected sites (Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation) in England is managed will be reviewed following a proposed legal challenge, Defra has today (11 September 2019) confirmed.

This will not result in any immediate changes for owners or occupiers of land.

In response to a pre-action protocol (PAP) letter from Wild Justice, Defra accepted in principle the annual release of non-native gamebirds, specifically the Common Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge, can be considered a 'plan or project' requiring appropriate assessment within the meaning of the Habitats Directive.

While not accepting the argument that current laws do not provide for appropriate assessment in such cases, Defra proposes to undertake a review to consider the legislative arrangements around the relevant activities and whether there are ways in which their effectiveness could be improved. The detail of this review will be developed over the coming weeks.

Upcoming review and next steps

Defra will undertake a review to consider the legislative arrangements in England around the relevant activities and whether there are ways in which their effectiveness could be improved. The detail of this review will be developed over the coming weeks. A review of this nature will take time to conduct and it will only be after a thorough examination that it will become clear if any subsequent change is necessary.

What to do if you release gamebirds on protected sites

This will not result in any immediate changes for owners or occupiers of land.

The legislative regime surrounding gamebird releases will remain unchanged in the immediate term and there will be no impact on the industry. The industry will be kept informed of progress with the review in due course.