

General licences: survey marks new phase of review

Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers today (12 September) launched a [public survey](#) as part of a planned review of general licences to manage wild birds in England.

The aim of the review is to ensure the licensing system is robust, striking the right balance between the protection of wild birds and the activities people such as landowners and farmers need to carry out for specific purposes, such as protecting livestock or crops and for conservation purposes. Defra is leading this review in close partnership with Natural England.

As a first step, Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers has launched a 12-week online survey to gather evidence on the control that stakeholders consider is required under general licence. This is one strand of the review, with a series of stakeholder workshops also planned to run in parallel.

Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers said:

I completely understand the scale of interest in this important issue and the real concern of users who need to have confidence in the licensing system.

Working closely with Natural England, this survey is an important step in our wider review of general licences.

I want to encourage users and other interested parties to take part in the process. This will help us ensure our licences strike the right balance between the protection of wild birds and the important actions users need to take to protect livestock or crops, and for conservation purposes.

[The review was announced earlier this year](#) when Defra issued three new short-term licences to control wild birds to [conserve wild birds and flora or fauna \(WML GL34\)](#); [preserve public health or public safety \(WML GL35\)](#); and [prevent serious damage to livestock, foodstuffs for livestock, crops, vegetables, fruit, growing timber, fisheries or inland waters \(WML GL36\)](#).

The survey will focus on the purposes covered by these three general licences. All information submitted will be considered alongside evidence received during Defra's shorter call for evidence held in Spring 2019, which highlighted some areas where evidence is currently lacking. This survey therefore builds on that call for evidence, asking for more specific information to feed into the development of a future licensing system.

In parallel with the survey, Defra and Natural England will be conducting a

series of workshops with interested groups in the autumn, covering particular topics such as activity on protected sites.

Natural England's interim chief executive Marian Spain said:

Our aim has always been to ensure that there is a robust licensing system in place which takes into account the needs of people and wildlife.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with Defra and with stakeholders and users on the ground to help achieve this.

- On 25 April 2019, following a legal challenge by Wild Justice, Natural England revoked three general licences which enabled users to kill or take certain species of wild birds (GL04, 05 and 06).
- The [general licences subsequently issued by Defra](#) on 14 June (GL34, 35 and 36) were designed to give certainty to users while we reviewed the longer term general licensing requirements.
- This review of the three general licences, in partnership with Natural England, aims to ensure that the general licensing regime is robust and meet user needs. Building on the responses received during the brief call for evidence into general licences in May 2019, a wider and longer period of consulting and engaging stakeholders is an essential part of this review.