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Mr John Blair
21 Carnmoney Road
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4th February 2021

Dear Mr Blair,

Public Consultation - Private Members Bill to Ban Hunting of Wild Mammals with Dogs

The Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) is the largest farming organisation in Northern Ireland (NI) representing approximately 11,500 farming families. The UFU represents farmers from all areas of NI across all sectors and has a vision of a productive, profitable and progressive farming sector.

It has come to the attention of the UFU that you plan to use a Private Members Bill (PMB) to ban the hunting of wild mammals with dogs in NI, and if successful the Bill would also ban trail hunting and effectively outlaw flushing with dogs for pest control (terrier work). The preamble to the online questionnaire states there is *strong support from the farming community to ban hunting with dogs*. What farming organisation have you consulted with to obtain this 'support'? There has been no engagement with UFU on this subject and as the largest democratic voluntary organisation representing farmers and growers in NI, it is difficult to understand how such a statement can be made.

Hunts are only permitted access to farmland if granted by the landowner, meaning farmers decide their own position on the hunt and its place in the countryside. The UFU has a long standing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Countryside Alliance and the Northern Ireland Masters of Hounds Association, meaning problems can be raised by landowners and rectified quickly. What is the justification for the statement *'hunting with dogs also presents a significant biosecurity threat to livestock when hunts trample from one farm to another, potentially spreading disease?'* Once again, it is the landowners decision as to whether or not the hunt can travel across their land; farmers would not grant access if there was a biosecurity risk to their business. Private landowners have granted access to the countryside for other recreational activities such as dog walking. Dogs, whether pets or hounds have the same ability to spread disease and worry livestock. Should all dogs not owned by the farmer be prohibited on farmland? In fact, an individual walker presents a greater biosecurity risk to a farm than a hunt, as the farmer is not likely to know who or when the walking route is used. If the hunt crosses farmland, the landowner will know in advance and can contact the hunt should a disease outbreak occur. In the event of a disease outbreak the farmer, the hunt and the farm vet can work together to identify the source and progress a solution.

Hunting of mammals using dogs has been a method of pest control employed by farmers for centuries. The fox population requires management as it is a real and present predator in NI to domestic poultry flocks and lambs especially. If the PMB were to be passed, how do you propose that foxes and other pests are managed? Are your alternative methods of pest control more or less favourable in the eyes of the public compared to hunting with dogs? It is also important to consider the welfare of the hounds

and horses, should all forms of hunting be banned, there would no longer be a need for these animals. Ireland has long history of breeding successful hunting horses and this market would be destroyed if hunting were not to continue.

Hunting is a traditional sport that has been an aspect of rural life for many years and provided jobs such as hounds men, horse breeders, transporters, feed providers etc. Hounds men also provide livestock farmers with a valuable deadstock disposal service. You have been known to support keeping jobs in rural areas, yet in creating this PMB, jobs in the countryside and a valuable service to farmers would no longer be sustainable.

As stated in the preamble to the questionnaire *'there has been a strong lobby in NI to ban hunting with dogs and other cruel sports.'* and that this PMB will address *'weakness identified in the Scottish (Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 200 and Westminster (The Hunting Act 2004, England and Wales).'* We are concerned through the extreme nature of your PMB and survey, that this will pave the path for calls to ban other country activities, such as shooting , also used to control pests, or fishing.

Finally, the UFU has concerns about the validity of the online survey. The questions are biased and therefore UFU have written, rather than respond to the survey.

If you require anything further information, please do not hesitate to get in contact.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victor Bestwell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

UFU President