



Rebecca Pow MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
DEFRA
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Contact: Mayor Ros Jones
Telephone: [Redacted]
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Date: 22nd July 2020

Dear Rebecca

Burning of moorland upstream from Doncaster

I have received the attached letter dated 4th July 2020 from Luke Steele, Managing Director of Ban Bloodsports on Yorkshire's Moors, and I wish therefore to raise the following issues with you.

Doncaster Council, along with its strategic partners in 'Team Doncaster,' declared a climate and biodiversity emergency in September 2019, and has established a Climate Commission to advise on strategy.

Doncaster was severely impacted by flooding of the river Don in November 2019, the headwaters of which are situated in Pennine peatland, including within the Peak District National Park. There has since been further flooding 'near misses' so we regard this as a continued threat requiring a full range of natural, engineering and planning approaches. We therefore have a clear stake in the state of the uplands peat environment around the headwaters of the river Don, the health of which has a direct impact on the citizens of Doncaster.

The value of peatland has also been brought home to us by wildfires in May this year at Hatfield Moor in Doncaster borough, which is part of the Humberhead Levels National Nature Reserve. Though not connected with grouse shooting and managed burning, we realise how fragile these precious wetland ecosystems are, and have lost a huge quantity of naturally sequestered carbon to the atmosphere as Carbon Dioxide.

Increasingly we are thinking in terms of Natural Capital, and hence our place in Yorkshire and its bioregion beyond our borough's borders.

We are aware that the debate on driven grouse shooting and managed peat burning has become politicised, some seeing criticism of grouse estate management as an attack on rural communities and businesses. We would prefer that independent and validated scientific evidence took precedence to the lobbying of interest groups when making policy.

We note that the House of Commons debate on the e-petition 254607 Restoring Nature and Climate Change on 28 October 2019 contains the statement by Zac Goldsmith, the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:-

Several hon. Members talked about the problem of burning peatlands. There is no doubt that they are right; the Government share that view. There has been an attempt, through voluntary

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initiatives, to scale back—to reduce and eventually eliminate—the burning of fragile and important peat ecosystems, but that has not proven 100% successful as had been hoped. We are developing a legislative response to the problem and we will come back to the House in due course with our plans. P.55

We also note that the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) makes the following comments in its most recent report Reducing UK emissions: Progress Report to Parliament (June 2020)

Tree planting and peatland restoration can both bolster carbon sequestration and better prepare our environment for future climate change. (p.151)

Peatland degradation is projected to increase significantly in hotter, drier conditions, particularly if the landscape is already degraded which makes the case even more strongly for widespread peatland restoration to also contribute to Net Zero. The risk of wildfires becoming established and spreading is likely to go up. (p.171)

The CCC's Reports recommendations for government departments to develop a new policy framework to incentivise emissions reductions across UK land, including '***banning the burning of peat.***' (p.182)

We quote this report here as we believe that the Committee on Climate Change is a trusted advisor to the government, and that it is also rigorous in its scientific approach.

Further, we note the findings in a **report Effects of moorland burning on the ecohydrology of river basins research into moorland burning at water@Leeds** (EMBER, 2018)

https://water.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2017/06/EMBER_2-page_exec_summary.pdf

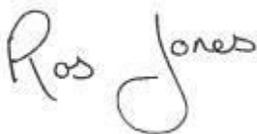
Key relevant findings are:

- *Water-table depth is very important in peatlands for maintaining their stability and function as a carbon store. Water tables were found to be significantly deeper for burned catchments than for unburned ones. Deeper water tables would suggest a greater scope for degradation of the peat and loss of carbon to the atmosphere.*
- *Sphagnum is an important peat-forming species. Changes in the hydrological properties of the peat after fire make the peat less conducive to Sphagnum moss growth.*
- *River flow in catchments where burning has taken place appears to be slightly more prone to higher flow peaks during heavy rain. However, this was not a conclusive finding.*

We expect therefore that Doncaster's interests are best served by the proper restoration of upland peat areas, and as indications are that this would not involve managed burning, we would be expecting DEFRA to follow through on their commitment.

We would like to see this hand in hand with greater public investment in natural flood management methods, for example, through local levies to Regional Flood Management Committees.

Kind regards.



Ros Jones
Mayor of Doncaster

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