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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP

Our ref: MC2022/02426

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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 31 January on behalf of your constituents about trail hunting.

The Hunting Act 2004 makes it an offence to hunt a wild mammal with dogs except where it is carried out in accordance with the exemptions in the Act, and completely bans hare coursing. The full details of the Hunting Act 2004 exemptions are available online at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/37/schedule/1.

Those found guilty under the Act are subject to the full force of the law and enforcement is an operational matter for the police. The recent court case of R v Hankinson has demonstrated that when there are breaches, the Act allows for enforcement in a demonstrable and public manner. The Government will not amend the Hunting Act.

We recognise it is possible that dogs used for trail hunting may on occasion pick up and follow the scent of live foxes during a trail hunt. If this occurs it is the responsibility of the huntsman and other members of hunt staff to control their hounds and, if necessary, stop the hounds as soon as they are made aware that the hounds are no longer following the trail that has been laid.

Failure to prevent dogs from chasing or killing a fox may be taken as intent to break the law. Anyone who believes that an offence has taken place should report the matter to the police, as the police deal with complaints of illegal hunting. Decisions on the arrest and prosecution of those taking part in illegal hunting activities are matters for the police and prosecuting authorities; they will, among other things, need to take into account any failure on behalf of the huntsman to prevent the dogs from chasing or killing a fox.

RT HON GEORGE EUSTICE MP