

Proposed Bill to ban hunting mammals with dogs : consultation summary

Analysis of responses to the consultation on the proposal to introduce a Private Member's Bill to introduce a ban the hunting of wild mammals, including deer, foxes, rabbits, hares and mink with dogs; to ban trail hunting; to place limits on flushing with dogs and to ban 'terrier work'.

A public consultation was carried out, in accordance with usual Northern Ireland Assembly practice, between 18th December 2020 and 12th February 2021. This received a very significant response and the views expressed are outlined below.

The eight-week consultation received 18,425 responses.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (78.16%) said all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs should be banned in Northern Ireland.

- 79.60% of respondents said 'terrier work', the activity to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover, was unacceptable.
- 78.82% of respondents said the law should make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity.
- 77.76% of respondents said people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves, should be liable to prosecution.

When asked what sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill:

- 55.75% said imprisonment, using the same Sentencing Schedule currently in place for the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011
- 4.04% said fixed penalty notices
- 5.14% said fines
- 35.06% said a mixture of the above

76.30% of respondents said they 'fully' supported the intentions of the proposed Bill.

Support for the Proposal

Out of the 18,425 respondents, 14,397 supported the proposed Bill to outlaw hunting with dogs, including trail hunting. They felt the "sport" was barbaric and outdated, with no place in modern society.

Examples from the reasons provided for supporting the Bill:

- "It is a grossly vicious way for an animal to die. Not only are the animals ripped apart, they are chased and driven to extreme fear for the sake of the enjoyment of the hunting party. It's just cruel and outdated. I'm not against hunting, I am against killing animals for enjoyment and trophies."
- "Hunting with dogs has been illegal in England, Scotland, and Wales for the past 15 years – it's time for Northern Ireland to follow suit."

- “Hunting is an outdated barbaric activity that belongs in the history books.”
- “It's time for people who enjoy these activities behind the excuse of it being a traditional country side pursuit to wise up. For those who argue that they are controlling numbers of some mammals there are more humane ways to achieve this. Similarly, to protect livestock, which I can understand and appreciate, there is still no justification for this type of barbaric hunting.”
- “I live in a rural part of NI and have seen first-hand the damage that is caused to property, domestic pets and ecosystems by this cruel and unnecessary "sport". Furthermore, as a landowner I seem to have no ability to take action against these unwelcome trespassers – the police state it is a private matter and I am unable to prosecute unknowns who refuse to identify themselves. The stress it has caused me knowing that - whilst trying to protect a natural ecosystem on my land - any Tom, Dick or Harry can appear with dogs without my permission and slaughter the animals I have tried so hard to protect. Most of whom are in dwindling numbers due to loss of habitat.”

Following the closure of the public consultation, an independent campaign supporting the legislation started which involved MLAs receiving emails from their constituents urging them to support the Bill if the opportunity arose.

As well as local media interviews, I was also pleased to engage with ITV News at Ten who reported on the overwhelming support for an outright ban on all hunting with dogs in Northern Ireland: <https://www.itv.com/news/2021-02-23/exclusive-nearly-80-back-ban-on-hunting-with-dogs-in-northern-ireland-survey-finds>.

Given the volume of responses to the public consultation, a sample of responses, rather than the full list, has been pulled from the survey platform and anonymised. Of the 18,425 responses, 90 came from organisations rather than individuals.

- **Responses to the public consultation were received from 21 animal welfare organisations and animal rights activists. All supported the Bill**
- **Responses to the public consultation were received from 22 hunting associations and gun clubs. All opposed the Bill.**
- **Seven other country sports associations responded to the public consultation, however, the proposed legislation makes no reference to these respective county sports. All opposed the Bill.**
- **Twenty responses to the public consultation were received from organisations from outside Northern Ireland. Ten supported the bill and ten were opposed.**

- **Lastly, responses to the public consultation were received from 20 organisations who identified as businesses that may be impacted by the implementation of the proposed Bill. Eight supported the Bill and 12 were opposed.**

Summary

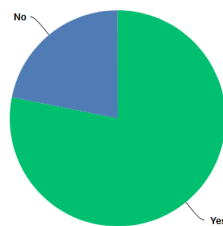
Between the 18th December 2020 and the 12th February 2021, the public consultation on the Private Member’s Bill to ban hunting wild mammals with dogs, received a staggering 18,425 responses. The summary below outlines the responses to each question asked in the consultation, which was conducted via surveying platform, Survey Monkey.

Question 1: Should all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs be banned in Northern Ireland?

Result: An overwhelming majority of respondents (78.16%) said all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs should be banned in Northern Ireland. Whereas, 4,023 respondents (21.84%) opposed a ban being implemented in Northern Ireland.

Should all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs be banned in Northern Ireland?

Answered: 18,420 Skipped: 5



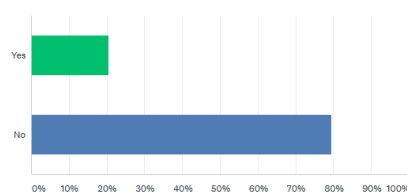
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	78.16%	14,397
No	21.84%	4,023
TOTAL		18,420

Question 2: Terrier work is a legal activity in Northern Ireland and the term describes dogs being put underground to attack and potentially kill a wild animal. Once a wild animal has gone to ground, is it acceptable to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover?

Result: 14,397 (79.60%) respondents said 'terrier work', the activity to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover, was unacceptable. In contradiction, 3,736 (20.40%) respondents thought the practice was acceptable.

Terrier work is a legal activity in Northern Ireland and the term describes dogs being put underground to attack and potentially kill a wild animal. Once a wild animal has gone to ground, is it acceptable to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover?

Answered: 18,311 Skipped: 114



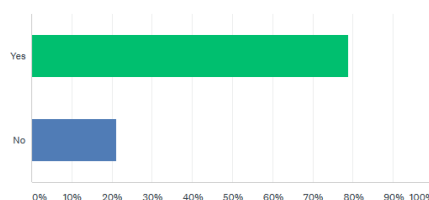
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	20.40%	3,736
No	79.60%	14,575
TOTAL		18,311

Question 3: Should the law make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity?

Result: 78.82% of respondents said the law should make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity. 21.18% of respondents opposed this suggestion.

Should the law make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity?

Answered: 18,345 Skipped: 80



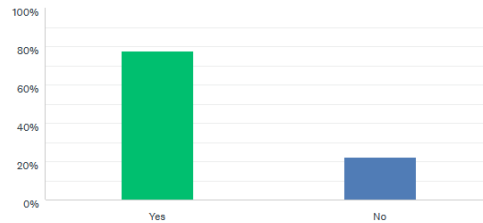
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	78.82%	14,459
No	21.18%	3,886
TOTAL		18,345

Question 4: Should people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves be liable to prosecution?

Result: 77.76% of respondents said people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves, should be liable to prosecution. 22.24% of respondents opposed this suggestion.

Should people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves be liable to prosecution?

Answered: 18,371 Skipped: 54



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	77.76%	14,286
No	22.24%	4,085
TOTAL		18,371

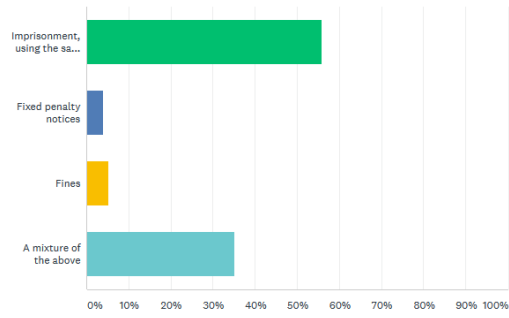
Question 5: What sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill?

Result: When asked what sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill:

- 55.75% said imprisonment, using the same Sentencing Schedule currently in place for the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011
- 4.04% said fixed penalty notices
- 5.14% said fines
- 35.06% said a mixture of the above

What sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill?

Answered: 16,196 Skipped: 2,229



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Imprisonment, using the same Sentencing Schedule currently in place for the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011	55.75% 9,030
▼ Fixed penalty notices	4.04% 655
▼ Fines	5.14% 833
▼ A mixture of the above	35.06% 5,678
TOTAL	16,196

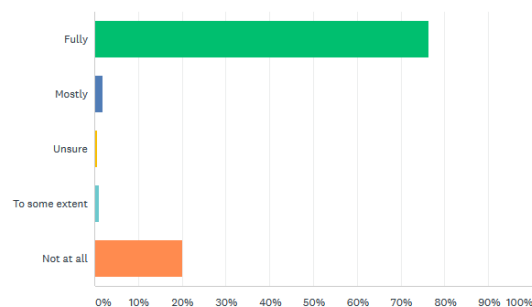
Question 6: To what extent do you support the ambitions of the Bill?

Result: When asked to what extent they supported the ambitions of the Bill:

- 76.30% of respondents said they ‘fully’ supported the intentions of the proposed Bill
- 1.99% of respondents said they ‘mostly’ supported the intentions of the proposed Bill
- 0.53% said they were ‘unsure’
- 1.10% supported the intentions of the proposed Bill ‘to some extent’
- 20.08% of respondents said they did not support the proposed Bill ‘at all’

To what extent do you support the ambitions of the Bill?

Answered: 18,318 Skipped: 107



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Fully	76.30% 13,977
▼ Mostly	1.99% 364
▼ Unsure	0.53% 97
▼ To some extent	1.10% 202
▼ Not at all	20.08% 3,678
TOTAL	18,318

Question 7: If you do NOT agree with the Bill proposal, please outline why.

Sample of responses provided below:

- *“Hunting with hounds is the most humane way of controlling foxes, and because the Bill makes no attempt to proscribe cruelty per se.”*
- *“Hunting is a rural activity and way of life for hundreds of years.”*
- *“It is an attack on all country sports and will lead as before to an attack on angling and other sports.”*
- *“The contribution that hunting with dogs makes to the rural economy is fourfold: hunts themselves and hunting organisations employ full-time and part-time staff; people who participate in hunting with dogs employ stable-staff or keep their hunting horses at livery, thereby providing further employment; hunts, hunting organisations, their members and followers incur direct expenditure on goods and services in order to participate in hunting; expenditure by the participants of hunting with dogs stimulates the rural economy by creating a demand for other goods and services. This indirect expenditure arising from hunting generates income and jobs for others. It can enable small businesses to have enough overall income to trade profitably.”*

Question 8: Is ending hunting wild mammals with dogs important to you, if so, why?

Sample of responses provided below:

- *“It is vital that Northern Ireland leads the way with a full and comprehensive ban on hunting with dogs and does not duplicate the exemptions and loopholes which have allowed animals to continue to be chased and killed in the rest of the UK. A hunting ban in Northern Ireland must prevent ‘trail’ hunting from being used as a cover for illegal hunting. ‘Trail’ hunting was invented by hunts after hunting was banned in England and Wales and purports to mimic traditional hunting by following an animal-based scent trail laid in areas where foxes or hares are likely to be. When an animal is killed by the hounds it is common for hunts to claim it was an ‘accident’, preventing prosecution.”*
- *“Hunting with dogs involves horrendous cruelty to animals and should have no place in Northern Ireland. A ban in Northern Ireland would increase pressure on the government in the Republic of Ireland to follow suit. These bans are long overdue and have majority support from the public.”*
- *“We completely support campaign to ban hunting live mammals with dogs. Mounted hunts that ride out with packs of hounds are causing havoc in our rural communities, by way of trespass and mistreatment of all animals involved... Horses that have been weathered out or stabled with little or no exercise are simply expected to perform to a standard which they are often unable to achieve due to lack of condition. Hunts are ‘free for all’ riders who show little or no regard for their horse’s health. They use excessive force to make the horse jump walls, fences, ditches and shucks, especially if the horse dares to refuse. A beating is guaranteed... The hunting community show no compassion for their horses - after all, they are disposable and a cheap replacement can be found in most equine classified sections.”*
- *“Hunting wild animals with dogs is an outdated and inhumane practice which must be stopped. Animals hunted by dogs die terrified and in agony, often pursued until exhaustion before being torn to pieces by a number of dogs. The Burns Report of 2000 stated “there is a lack of firm scientific evidence about the effect on the welfare of a fox of being closely pursued, caught and killed above ground by hounds. We are satisfied, nevertheless, that this experience seriously compromises the welfare of the fox.” In addition to causing unnecessary and unacceptable suffering to the wild animal, hunting with dogs puts the dogs involved at significant risk of sustaining serious, sometimes life-threatening, injuries when fighting with a wild animal.”*