



**BRITISH
GAME
ALLIANCE**
FOR THE FUTURE OF GAME

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Evidence for DEFRA's Review of the General Licence for Pigeons from the British Game Alliance

The British Game Alliance is the National Marketing Board for feathered game, which includes pigeons. We are also the industry regulator ensuring 'best practice' is adhered to throughout the supply chain from egg to plate, comparable to Red Tractor for the shooting community.

We understand and respect that as per the current and previous general license, pigeons should only be shot to protect crops, the NFU and other shooting NGO's will be addressing this point in far greater detail. The BGA (which is not a shooting lobbyist) wishes to inform DEFRA on how the proposed new general license will have a significant impact and negative effect on over 50 game processing businesses across the country. These businesses process roughly 4 - 4.5 million wood pigeons a year, with a 10% annual increase in numbers over the past five years, this not only shows the suggested 5.4 million breeding pairs quoted by the RSPB is wholly inaccurate but that this annual harvest of wild meat is totally sustainable in its current form.

These 50+ businesses heavily rely on pigeons in the 'off-season' to generate sufficient income to retain their skilled staff. With further restrictions on shooting pigeons over 1,000 jobs could be at severe risk just from the processors, let alone those that make a living from shooting and selling pigeons, which is estimated into the many thousands. This puts the whole game processing business at severe risk as a loss of important income during these months could mean closure of many UK game processors, something we cannot afford to happen. If we lose any more processors within the game sector it would have huge ramifications throughout the game sector with no route to market for our game, a very big problem indeed. As to be expected the number of pigeons coming through these processors has dropped by 80% since the GL revocation with only a small increase since the new licence issued by Natural England, which has proven very difficult to interpret.

Pigeon has become a desirable, mainstream and sustainable source of protein with many of the major retailers selling it in large volumes all year round. The UK market share has increased by over 20% year on year over the last five years, which clearly demonstrates the British public's attitude towards this meat. Consumer demand for sustainable protein is an ever-increasing trend and one that is hugely important in today's world where we need to be conscious of traditional farming methods and the environment.

The supply of wood pigeon is consistent due to the sheer numbers of birds in the UK. Which only ever increases despite the annual culling, the BTO's figures suggest that the population has increased 79% in the last 25 years. **We should be looking to put wood pigeon on the game license going forward, with licenses granted to land owners who have crops to protect in the 'off season'. We believe these off-season licenses need to be straightforward for the land owners to obtain allowing whoever they chose to be able to conduct crop protection as and when.**

We believe game as a whole has a much bigger part to play in the future of sustainable protein sources whether it be venison, grouse, pheasant or pigeon, this low carbon footprint sector which has huge environmental and ecological benefits must be considered as a viable alternative to intensive farming.