From: [redacted] (NE)
To: [redacted] (NE);
Subject: FW: chicken appl
Date: 12 September 2012 13:52:06

[redacted] has now summarised

_____ _____

From: [redacted] (ERG-BIO)
Sent: 12 September 2012 13:50
To: [redacted] (NE)
Subject: chicken appl

[redacted]

From the below you'll see a summary of my concerns about this application and points where I think challenge might come from if a licence is granted, it consolidates the earlier email points I hope:

[redacted]**Chicken Farm Application**

Facts:

- [redacted] acre smallholding with 600+ free range chickens
- Sells eggs to local businesses and sells on chickens after 2 years laying
- Business turnover £[redacted], net profit £[redacted]
- One witnessed incident of predation 18/04/2012
- Up to 52 predation losses claimed in the period Nov 2010 to Oct 2011
- Expect 26 to be lost to natural mortality in a year

Other anecdotal info put forward

- Losses are being described at a rate of 1-2 per day

- Losses appear to be more serious in periods of cold weather
- Stated that improved scaring seems to have improved the situation
- Felt that diversionary feeding would attract other predators
- Buzzards are seen on carcasses
- Only one buzzard has been observed in the hen field at a time
- The "suspects" favour particular fence and telegraph posts
- Aerial tapes thought to be beneficial (see Fera Desk study) were used, but there are "signs" the buzzard got under the tape.
- Fall in egg production was blamed on stress caused by buzzards, in fact, there was a feed problem.

Concerns:

In calculating serious damage the estimate is 7.25%. This includes the cost of replacing the hens, the losses through missed egg and meat sales, and offset the costs of food not consumed. In my view this double counts the problem. If you replace the hens, the other two losses are not issues. This would mean the loss is closer to about 3% - [redacted] rather than [redacted]. I would not consider this "serious" damage.

There is an argument that you can't just keep replacing a few hens as they get taken, because of screening, vaccination, introduction to the flock and this is why the "double counting" above is accepted. Investment in a few more hens at the outset every year when a bulk order is made would keep the losses down to that lower figure above.

It does appear that diversionary feeding has been dismissed as it could have potential to encourage other predators. This was discussed in the Buzzard Stakeholder Group and we concluded that if used for short periods (in the case of pheasants it would be at times when poults most vulnerable) it could be effective. The case evidence indicates that the problem becomes worse during periods of severe weather- could there be merit in trialling diversionary feeding for these short periods?

It is clear that very little tangible evidence exists that the damage is being done by buzzards- just one observation of taking is recorded. There have been observations of buzzards on carcasses and carcasses which appear to have been devoured by birds of prey. That does not prove buzzards are the cause of losses, or disprove it, but to be sure lethal action will be effective in resolving the problem, I would want to see stronger evidence buzzards are the culprits.

There is a comment that the introduction of increased scaring methods (which, is not clear) since Oct (2011?) appear to have reduced the rate of predation- so is there still "serious " damage?

The technical assessment concludes that the case is nearly at the threshold of significant damage in terms of % loss but that with an annual financial loss of several hundred £s significant damage is suggested. It recommends referral for peer review and considered as a candidate for a licence to be granted. It points out that even with targeting and despatching scaring should continue.

The peer review echoes the findings, but comments as follows:

> *"In this case, the preferred option is to seek to target the birds (believed to be a territorial pair) which are predating on chickens. We do not know for certain, however, that it is only certain birds responsible for predation, although this is likely based on the Applicant's observations. Furthermore, we do not know for certain if this approach will succeed in alleviating the problem and for how long. That said, predation on chickens does not appear to be a common behaviour amongst buzzards (as we have received so few licence applications to date) so it is possible that the behaviour of these birds is exceptional. If that proves to be the case, then removing the problem birds could provide a long term benefit for the Applicant. "*
>
> It recommends:
>
> *"..a licence is issued to permit two Common Buzzards to be shot. The aim should be to target the birds that are predating the chickens. Licensed action should be closely monitored by Natural England. "*

Conclusion:

In comparing the evidence with the tests required to be met when assessing

an application I would suggest:

Test Comment Test met?
Have all other reasonable non-lethal solutions been tried and/or shown to be ineffective? Improvement stated after reviewing scaring methods, will damage reduce as a result?

Could diversionary feeding help in severe weather?

Not clear
Is there a genuine problem or need? Losses seem to be occurring, the inference is this is from buzzards, but the damage is small 3% of net profit, 1.4% turnover. No
Are there suitable alternative solutions to lethal control? Possibly, see diversionary feeding etc above. No
Will lethal control resolve the problem? It is not certain, the individual rogue buzzards have not been indentified No
Will the cumulative effect of licences have a detrimental effect on the species? None have been issued and buzzard population is healthy Yes
Are there any other factors to consider? No Yes

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Defra

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

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