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NZ Game Animal Council

GAC questions the political parties

By Tim Gale – General Manager, Game Animal Council

With the general election just around the corner GAC asked the five political parties currently represented in Parliament six questions of specific interest to hunters. This was undertaken as part of our ongoing role to provide information to the hunting sector. I want to thank Labour's David Parker, National's Jacqui Dean, Eugenie Sage of the Greens and David Seymour of Act for providing their responses. Unfortunately, New Zealand First failed to provide a response. All responses are included unedited and without commentary.

If you have any queries about the work of the Game Animal Council you can contact us through our website, our Facebook page or at admin@nzgac.org.nz.

Happy hunting.

For many New Zealand communities hunting is a way of life, contributes to positive mental and physical health, and provides food for the table. What will your party do to support the sector in improving the acceptance of hunting as a safe and traditionally important activity?



Labour recognises hunting is an important part of life for many New Zealanders, and in some cases a critical source of food. We're committed to working alongside hunters to increase understanding of hunting and foster participation.



I agree that hunting is a healthy activity and an important way of life for many people. National is committed to acknowledging the recreational benefits not only to the hunting community but also to game animal control on public land.

Misguided comments from some are unhelpful but I think the Game Animal Council has done a good job to reflect the positive aspects of hunting as well as improving hunter education and safety.

There's been a re-emergence of New Zealanders' interest in spending time outdoors and that's something that should be encouraged and promoted. I want conservation land to be accessible and affordable and I want to see an improvement in the recreational opportunities available to all New Zealanders.

National believes that New Zealand's outdoor heritage is something we should all be proud of.

Green

The Green Party supports New Zealanders accessing the outdoors and will continue to ensure Government invests in encouraging outdoor recreation, improving public walking and cycle access to public conservation land and providing and maintaining facilities such as huts, tracks and campsites for outdoor users to enjoy. The Game Animal Council has a role in promoting safety and ensuring the public is aware of hunting.



Act has several keen hunters in our ranks this election who have an appreciation of the benefits hunting brings not only to their table but to the environment. Act started improving the acceptance of hunting within the wider community at our campaign launch where our #3 Nicole McKee spoke of the wonders of the wild game in our backyard and the benefits of that resource to the community. We intend to continue this positive advocacy well past election.

Public access is of significant concern to recreational hunters as hunting requires the carriage of firearms and sometimes dogs. This sometimes precludes hunter access. Does your party agree that hunters should be on an equal footing when access is being considered, with the basic premise that firearms and dogs should be able to be carried unless there is a specific justification for them not to be?



There are a range of complex challenges between hunting and conservation, and, as a party, we believe there's a need to strike a reasonable balance. New Zealand's conservation land is vitally important and our native wildlife needs as much protection as we can provide, for example, many of our native birds are flightless and have few or no defences against predators, including dogs. That being said, Labour will continue to engage with a range of groups and organisations from across the hunting sector to further ensure we strike the right balance.



There needs to be a common sense approach here. The question should be: Is there any justifiable reason why hunting with firearms and/or dogs cannot be permitted in this area? If it is inappropriate the reason should be made clear. If we start with positive intent, we are more likely to see favourable outcomes for hunters.



Dogs can harm protected native species such as kiwi which are very vulnerable to dogs, so restrictions on dogs are necessary in order to protect indigenous species. One hunting dog was responsible for the death of potentially hundreds of kiwi in Waitangi Forest in 1987. Hunting may also conflict with other recreational users so equal access is not always appropriate.



Our core principles include freedoms to act, to be and to access as long as you adhere to the laws and do not interfere with others rights to privacy. Hunters and their activities play a vital role in conserving nature and should be a significant part of access discussions. Hunters consistently prove their ability to support wildlife by partaking in initiatives like the Kiwi Aversion Scheme.

Will your party commit to facilitating greater hunting sector input into game animal (deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs) management and conservation programs, including by assisting the hunting community to contribute better scientific data to understand the impact of commercial and recreational hunting on game animal herds?



Labour appreciates that the partnership between the hunting sector and DOC is vital to game animal management in New Zealand, such as the Himalayan tahr control operations. We're committed to continuing to work with, and encourage greater input from, the hunting sector to control game animal herds and support important conservation work.



Absolutely. Government ministers and their departments should have a good working relationship with key stakeholders including members of the hunting community. If you can get the key stakeholders around the table at the outset it saves time and money in the long-run and leads to better decision making. Government ministers and officials are not experts on every subject, we need to utilise the expertise of those willing to be part of the process.

National believes in taking a pragmatic approach to conservation decisions – they should be based on science not ideology. If the hunting community are willing to contribute to the gathering of scientific data that would be welcomed.

National would also stay true to any commitment it makes to the hunting community.



The Game Animal Council and the Thar Liaison Implementation Group have considerable opportunities to provide advice on the control and management of game animals.



Act have committed to ensuring that the Game Animal Council are empowered and financially resourced to achieve its statutory obligations and functions by writing it into our Hunting and Conservation policy. We believe that the GAC already have the mandate to facilitate, just not the funding. Act believes it essential this statutory body achieve its purpose.

COVID-19 has decimated the commercial hunting sector, which has historically been worth at least \$50 million per year and helps support hundreds of jobs. What plan does your party have to support the sector through the recovery and will you commit to support the marketing of New Zealand as a premium hunting destination to international hunters once border restrictions are lifted?



Labour invested heavily in a direct economic response to COVID; this has cushioned the blow of the virus on our economy, saved tens of thousands of jobs and helped keep businesses going. But we know the road ahead will be challenging. That's why we're taking action to grow our economy, create new jobs and sustain people in alternative forms of work. For example, our Jobs for Nature programme will provide up to 11,000 jobs, and many of these can be filled by workers temporarily displaced from the hunting and tourism sector. We're supporting our tourism sector to recover and restart with a \$400 million targeted Tourism Recovery Fund, the Wage Subsidy Scheme, and a domestic tourism campaign, so we're ready to welcome back international visitors as soon as safety possible. We are working with businesses and the industry to re-imagine how tourism will operate in a post-COVID-19 world, that means short term focus on domestic tourism before looking at how we can target an international offering.



Hunting businesses have taken a massive hit with the border closure and I pushed the Conservation Minister hard to waive fees for those concession holding businesses operating on conservation land.

I have also taken the minister to task on the tahr cull and have publicly stated that Bull tahr should be left to recreational and commercial hunters. Overseas hunters pay around \$14,000 per bull - we need that sort of premium tourism experience to assist in the post COVID-19 recovery.

I would be happy to discuss the marketing of New Zealand as a premium hunting destination with tourism colleagues should National win the election.



The Green Party is proud to be part of a Government that acted quickly at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to support businesses and workers through the wage subsidy scheme. Recently we supported the extension to the small business cashflow (loan) scheme. We have no policies to provide government funding to advertise New Zealand as a hunting destination.



Act acknowledges the large revenue that guided hunting brings into the New Zealand economy and values that input. We have committed to supporting the GAC to manage game numbers, education and work with the sector to revitalise this important tourism activity once our borders can safely open.

Fair firearms rules are extremely important to the hunting sector. Is your party willing to reconsider rules that seek to impose impractical and unworkable compliance for hunters without making a discernible difference to public safety?



Labour's overarching position on firearms is driven by the need to ensure public safety is as strong as it can be. That's why we moved to ensure that every part of our risk-management system – from licensing, to security requirements, and the firearms themselves – is robust. That being said, we appreciate that firearms are widely and safely used amongst our hunting and farming communities, and, we're committed to enabling their continued safe use for legitimate purposes.



In 2019, National released 13 changes we wanted to see in the second tranche of gun reforms that address access to guns by gangs and those involved in criminal activity. The Government's Bill instead focused responsibility and regulation on law-abiding gun owners.

National has discussed firearms law and reforms with Gun Control NZ, individual gun owners and firearms organisations. Our focus would be on people who could pose a risk to society, rather than those New Zealanders complying with the law.



It is unclear which parts of the new gun control laws you are referring to, but the Green Party supported both laws that were passed through Parliament in the last 18 months. These laws implement recommendations from multiple different reviews of our gun laws stretching over 20 years. The laws allow for fit and proper people to access firearms and provide for pest control needs, but also remove the ability of the general public to access military-style weapons and provide for a gun registry to be established. It was appropriate in the response to the March 15 terrorist attack that we tightened our gun regulations, which were very permissive in comparison to countries like Australia and the United Kingdom.



Give us your party vote and Act will prioritise the repealing of the Arms Legislation Act 2020. We will then set about writing a new Arms Bill that will ultimately replace the Arms Act 1983 and all its subsequent amendments. It's time to start fresh and produce a piece of legislation that addresses the safe use, control and public safety concerns with valued stakeholder input.

Private landowners, particularly deer farmers and game estate owners, have long faced the issue of illegal hunting on their land. Will your party consider legislative changes to enhance our trespass laws and provide Police with greater powers to prosecute illegal hunting?



Labour has always been responsive to the needs of communities, including rural communities. In 2018, we cracked down on livestock rustling after farmers spoke out about the toll it was having on their livelihoods and way of life. We believe the vital contribution farmers and rural communities make to New Zealand shouldn't be undermined by illegal activity.



Illegal hunting and stock rustling have been a growing problem. It's dangerous, costly to landowners and their actions reflect badly on the hunting community. The recent case where a poacher was sentenced to 250 hours community work and had to forfeit his firearm and boat to the crown sent a strong message. The law needs to be enforced and resources need to be made available to identify those responsible.



We would hope that the current trespass laws and rules around illegal hunting would be able to appropriately cover the issue of illegal hunting on private land. Evidence is needed that they are not working to support any case for legislative change.



Successful future Arms legislation would require open dialogue on a number of issues with those who are impacted by those issues. We expect real consultation be given to illegal hunting activities and its penalties with emphasis on what is making a difference to deterrence, what can be improved and how.