

THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR SHOOTING AND CONSERVATION

Current Arrangements for the Suspension of Wildfowl Shooting during Prolonged Severe Weather

The arrangements currently applying for suspending the shooting of wildfowl and wader species during periods of severe weather are detailed below.

They provide the basis for the Secretary of State, under Section 2(6) and (7) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, to declare any period not exceeding 14 days as a period of special protection for any birds included in Part I of Schedule 2 of the Act with respect to the whole or any specified part of Great Britain. Before making such an order he must consult a person appearing to him to be a representative of persons interested in the shooting of those birds. In practice, this means the BASC. The species normally covered by such an order are mallard, teal, wigeon, pintail, tufted duck, pochard, shoveler, gadwall, goldeneye, pink-footed goose, greylag goose, white-fronted goose, Canada goose, golden plover, woodcock, snipe, coot and moorhen.

The criteria for triggering severe weather procedures are based on the state-of-ground data collected daily by 23 coastal National Climatological Message Stations around Britain, 9 in Scotland and 15 in England/Wales (with one being shared). The locations of the stations are given in Figure 1. They undertake standard climatological recording of state-of-ground at 09.00 hrs, seven days a week, passing the data to Bracknell, London, the same morning. The stations are chosen to give the best available coverage of the coastline, but the choice is influenced by those that can provide the required information.

The state-of-ground is determined according to two series of codes as below.

E - state of the ground without snow or measurable ice cover

- 0 Surface of ground dry (without cracks and no appreciable amount of dust or loose sand)
- 1 Surface of ground moist
- 2 Surface of ground wet (standing water in small or large pools on surface)
- 3 Flooded
- 4 Surface of ground frozen
- 5 Glaze on ground
- 6 Loose dry dust or sand not covering ground completely
- 7 Thin cover of loose dry dust or sand covering ground completely
- 8 Moderate or thick cover of loose dry dust or sand covering ground completely
- 9 Extremely dry with cracks

E' - state of the ground with snow or measurable ice cover

- 0 Ground predominantly covered by ice
- 1 Compact or wet snow (with or without ice) covering less than one-half of the ground.
- 2 Compact or wet snow (with or without ice) covering at least one-half of the ground, but ground not completely covered.
- 3 Even layer of compact or wet snow covering ground completely
- 4 Uneven layer of compact or wet snow covering ground completely
- 5 Loose dry snow covering less than one-half of the ground
- 6 Loose dry snow covering at least one-half of the ground (but not completely)
- 7 Even layer of loose dry snow covering ground completely
- 8 Uneven layer of loose dry snow covering ground completely
- 9 Snow covering ground completely; deep drifts

'Severe weather' is defined as occurring when more than half of the meteorological stations in each country (i.e. 8 or more of the 15 stations in England/Wales; 5 or more of the 9 stations (one being shared with England/Wales) in Scotland) record state-of-ground E 4 or 5 or E' 0 to 9. 'Thaw' occurs when fewer than half of the appropriate stations record the above states-of-ground.

When seven days of frozen or snow-covered ground have been so recorded in Scotland or in England/Wales or both, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee informs the BASC accordingly. If the severe weather looks likely to continue the BASC informs, by first class post, the secretaries of its wildfowling and gameshooting clubs, Joint Councils and syndicates, that, if the severe weather continues for a further seven days, and looks likely to continue, a statutory order, suspending the shooting of ducks, geese and waders in the appropriate country is likely to be signed on the 13th day, to take effect on the 15th day, for a maximum period of 14 days. Press releases are also issued to all press and media outlets.

The BASC also calls on the shooting community to exercise voluntary restraint where appropriate. Advice is given that marked changes in bird behaviour, or in the numbers or species of waterfowl using a given area might suggest the need to introduce time limits on shooting so as to provide periods of undisturbed feeding for the birds. Where evidence appears of very difficult feeding conditions for waterfowl, such as declining body condition, freezing foreshore or snow-covered feeding grounds, then a total ban on shooting in the locality might be the appropriate response. The decision, though, is taken by the individual wildfowler or the wildfowling club, perhaps in liaison with other wildfowling groups in the vicinity, in response to local needs.

Should the conditions which necessitated the call for restraint continue until the 13th day, and look likely to continue, the JNCC, having consulted with the BASC and other conservation bodies, advises the appropriate Secretary of State to sign a statutory suspension order which would come into effect at 09.00 hrs on the 15th day. If a thaw of three or more days occurs within this period then the earlier days of severe weather are disregarded. Before signing, the Secretary of State normally consults with the BASC, as representing the persons interested in shooting wildfowl and waders.

Once the suspension order has been signed the BASC telephones as many as possible of its wildfowling and game shooting club secretaries, Joint Councils and syndicates, issues press releases to all newspapers, sporting magazines, radio and television editors, and institutes a 24 hour telephone information service. Similarly the Department of the Environment and Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department, as appropriate, issue press releases and place public notices of the suspension in the following national and regional newspapers: Times, Daily Telegraph, Daily Express, Daily Mail, Sun, Scotsman, Glasgow Herald, Dundee Courier and Advertiser, Aberdeen Press and Journal, Dumfries and Galloway Standard, Edinburgh Gazette and the Western Daily Mail.

Throughout the period of restraint and any statutory suspension, the collection of detailed information on local conditions and needs around the country is coordinated by the BASC (through its regional centres) and JNCC (for the country agencies, i.e. EN, CCW AND SNH). This information is used in monitoring the conditions around the country, identifying where voluntary restraint might be needed and, then helping decision-making over the lifting of any statutory suspension. The local contact network pays particular attention not only to the foreshore and freezing on inland waters and feeding grounds but also to the condition of birds, bird numbers and movements, appearance of unusual species, significance of wind chill and, especially in Scotland, snow cover.

A statutory suspension order is signed for a maximum period of 14 days although it is reviewed after a maximum of seven days. This review takes into account not only the state-

of-ground information, but also the reports from the local contact groups and the weather forecasts. It is undertaken by the JNCC in conjunction with the BASC and other conservation bodies. The lifting of a statutory suspension before the end of the maximum 14-day period takes into account the need for a period of recovery for waterfowl after the end of the severe weather itself. In this event the Department of the Environment or Scottish Office (AEFD) and the BASC undertake publicity campaigns as extensively as possible to inform the shooting community of the fact. If the suspension runs to the full 14 days and then lapses it is likely that the BASC only will undertake the appropriate publicity. It is clearly the responsibility of all shooting sportsmen to appraise themselves of the restrictions applying during periods of severe weather, and to act accordingly. The most up-to-date information is always available from the BASC Headquarters or Regional Centres.

If the severe weather continues beyond the end of the first 14-day period the appropriate Secretary of State, following agreement between the main organisations, is likely to be asked to sign another suspension order for a further maximum period of 14 days, which would then be managed in a similar way to the first. Once any suspension order has formally ended there is scope, if the local contact groups indicate the need, for continuing voluntary restraint to be encouraged in any parts of the country still not fully recovered.

After the end of any winter when these procedures are actually used, all the relevant shooting and conservation organisations and appropriate government departments review this operation to consider whether any further amendments are required.

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