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John Swift
Chair, Lead Ammunition Group

12 July 2016

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
From the Secretary of State

Dear Mr Swift,

Following your recent correspondence with Rory Stewart I am now in a position to respond to your report on Lead Ammunition, Wildlife and Human Health which you submitted on 3 June 2015.

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your hard work over the last five years. Please also pass on my thanks to all those that have played a part in bringing together the report and the information on which it is based.

It was disappointing that a number of Group members resigned and that a whole group consensus could not therefore be reached on this important issue. However I fully appreciate the challenges the divergence of opinions within the Group presented you with.

Following receipt of your report, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) sought independent scientific advice from the Committee on Toxicity about the human health risk assessment within it. This has led the FSA to conclude that the evidence provided in your report does not affect their current advice. This advice, which has been in place since 2012, states:

'To minimise the risk of lead intake, people who frequently eat lead-shot game, particularly small game, should cut down their consumption. This advice is especially important for vulnerable groups such as toddlers and children, pregnant women and women trying for a baby'.

With regard to the impact of lead ammunition on wildlife, we note that the report does not provide evidence of causation linking possible impacts of lead ammunition with sizes of bird populations in England.

In both instances – human health and wildlife – the report did not show that the impacts of lead ammunition were significant enough to justify changing current policy; we therefore do not accept your recommendation to ban the use of lead ammunition.

The use of lead ammunition is already banned on all foreshores, certain SSSIs and for the shooting of all ducks, geese, coot and moorhen. I do, however, recognise that there appears to be an issue with poor compliance with the Lead Shot Regulations and I can confirm that Defra will look at how the existing Regulations on wildfowling can be better implemented. We also understand that the FSA will be considering if action is required to raise awareness of their advice amongst the at-risk population.

As you know the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) has been asked by the European Commission to gather information on the potential risks presented by metallic lead, to establish if there is a case for regulating its use within the European Union; we will keep the evidence presented by the ECHA under review.

As agreed when the Group was initiated your report will be published on LAG's website. I appreciate that you are keen to publish your report and invite you to do so following receipt of this letter.

Although this marks the end of the Group which the Government established in 2010, I have no doubt that the evidence you have gathered together will form a useful input to the exercise the ECHA is taking forward. I would like to thank you again for your efforts.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Truss', written in a cursive style.

Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs