



## **BCG Newsletter General Update ~ April 2024**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The BCG has been busy on many fronts and this newsletter is circulated to provide an update.
- 1.2 A separate update covering the development of the new bracken control guidance will be circulated separately.

### **2 BCG Future**

- 2.1 The Position Statement has been published and is available on the [website](#).
- 2.2 During the BCG meeting in January, it was agreed that the name of the group would be changed to the Bracken Management Group.
  - 2.2.1 While this appears to be a simple change to make, it quickly becomes complicated. To do the job properly, it would be necessary to change the web address, e-mail addresses and re-brand the relevant BCG output.
  - 2.2.2 In view of the complications and the workload that we have taken on to develop the new bracken control guidance, this change has not been implemented yet.

### **3 Defra**

- 3.1 Substantial efforts have been made to engage with Defra. This led to a virtual meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> February led by the ELM Content Development Team Leader, and representatives of the Pesticides Hub and the RPA.
- 3.2 Disappointingly, there has been no follow up contact from Defra, since the meeting, even in response to nudging.
- 3.3 The lack of interest in the support and stakeholder links that the BCG can offer is seen as a missed opportunity for Defra. The point has been made that Defra needs to use the BCG or risk losing it.
- 3.4 The Scotland Office continues to show interest in the cause, and it is understood that Minister Lamont is also seeking further information from Defra about bracken control.

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#### **4 Scottish Bracken Working Group**

- 4.1 The Scottish Government formed this Group. A list of members is at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 Jackie Hughes, Head of SASA (Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture) chaired the first meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> March.
- 4.3 Terms of Reference were agreed.
- 4.4 The next meeting will be held in June.

#### **5 Conference, Seminar or workshop**

- 5.1 The concept of hosting a conference etc. was discussed at the last BCG meeting, and this remains an option for further consideration.
- 5.2 Some form of meeting would provide an opportunity to bring together the range of interests that have an interest in bracken and its control to reset the approach following the withdrawal of Asulox.
- 5.3 This may be something to consider as part of the development of the UK Bracken Strategic Framework; work on this is due to start later this year.

#### **6 Amendment of Agri-Environment Schemes - England**

- 6.1 A letter has been sent by the Rural Payments Agency to holders of Countryside Stewardship agreements that include chemical control of bracken (option SB4).
- 6.2 Agreement holders have three options:
  - 6.2.1 Use glyphosate in place of Asulox, if it was approved by Natural England or Forestry Commission during the CS application stage.
  - 6.2.2 Convert SB4 (chemical control) to SB5 (mechanical control).
  - 6.2.3 Remove the SB4 option.
- 6.3 There is a deadline of 20<sup>th</sup> May to inform the RPA if it is proposed to adopt one of the options at 6.2.2 or 6.2.3.
- 6.4 The BCG has seen a copy of one of the letters and it raises some concerns.
  - 6.4.1 The letter reads as an ill-thought-out response to the loss of Asulox.
  - 6.4.2 The contents do not appear to have been discussed with other agencies, such as Natural England, or anyone with a practical understanding of bracken control.

- 6.5 While glyphosate products may have a role in controlling bracken, especially if applied by weed wiper, they are not a direct replacement for Asulox.
  - 6.5.1 Additional guidance is required about the use of glyphosate (see section 8 below).
  - 6.5.2 The work carried out in the National Bracken Chemical Control Trials identified some significant side effects and also demonstrated that glyphosate cannot be relied upon to achieve good levels of control.
- 6.6 The BCG was not consulted about the three options even though reference is made to the Asulam page on the BCG website.
  - 6.6.1 This webpage has been updated to include details of the concerns about using glyphosate or amidosulfuron products.

## **7 Amendment of Agri-Environment Schemes – other parts of the UK**

- 7.1 It is expected that similar arrangements will be made to cover agreement holders in the other UK agri-environment schemes.
- 7.2 The BCG has not seen any other letters. If you have received such a letter, please could you forward a copy.

## **8 Chemical Control and Bracken Control Guidance**

- 8.1 The development of the new guidance will provide an opportunity to establish the position of the Nature Conservation Bodies, and other government agencies, on the use of alternative chemicals to control bracken.
- 8.2 Clarification is required to cover the use of glyphosate in a weed wiper, as an overall spray and spot treatment (for follow-up).
- 8.3 In view of the approaching bracken control season, if information becomes available before the publication of the new guidance, approval will be sought to circulate this through BCG channels.

## **9 Research**

- 9.1 Efforts are being made to find funding to allow the continuation of the trials that have been started on the North York Moors – see Bracken Briefing No.26.
- 9.2 It is possible that these trials could identify safe and effective chemical control options for the future.
- 9.3 It is most unlikely that approval to apply any product by helicopter will be achieved, but some chemical control could still be a useful part of bracken control programmes. The use of spray drones could also help to fill the gap left by the loss of helicopter application.
- 9.4 Funding for further work has not yet been identified.

## **10 The Timing of Mechanical and Physical Control Methods for Bracken**

- 10.1 Professor Roy Brown has provided his view about the timing of mechanical and physical control methods, if they are to have full effect.
- 10.2 He argues that up to three cuts, in June, July and August, are required to achieve the desired level of control. This may need to be repeated for several, or even many, years.
- 10.3 There is a potential clash with the start dates included in agri-environment agreements – normally 1<sup>st</sup> July or even 15<sup>th</sup> July – that are designed to prevent disturbance of breeding birds.
- 10.4 Is there scope for compromise arrangements that will make it possible to control bracken effectively while also protecting breeding birds?
- 10.5 Roy Brown's views will be published soon as Bracken Briefing No.27.

## **11 Spray Drones**

- 11.1 Drift trials with a spray drone have been completed successfully.
- 11.2 An Extrapolated Trial Permit is being applied for to allow the application of glyphosate on agreed trial sites.
- 11.3 An event to demonstrate the safety and effectiveness of spray drones is under consideration.

## **12 BCG Sector representatives**

- 12.1 The follow new sector representatives have been added:
  - 12.1.1 Katrina Candy, Director, The Heather Trust
  - 12.1.2 Andrew Gilruth, Chief Executive, The Moorland Association
  - 12.1.3 Andy Sproson, Autospray Systems (spray drones)

## **13 Newsletter Circulation**

- 13.1 The circulation has been reviewed as part of the development of the new bracken control guidance.
- 13.2 In addition to the Sector Representatives, the circulation currently stands at 478 from a wide range of sectors in all parts of the UK.
- 13.3 In addition, the BCG has been in contact with many other individuals and organisations in connection with the development of the new bracken control guidance. There are more details in the separate guidance newsletter.

## 14 Bracken Discussion Meeting

14.1 The Heather Trust is planning to host an evening virtual meeting with the BCG, in early June, to discuss the state of play with bracken and its control across the UK.

14.2 Watch out for further details that will be circulated in a separate BCG newsletter.

**Simon Thorp**

Coordinator

15<sup>th</sup> April 2024

## Appendix 1

### Scottish Bracken Working Group membership

<b>Government Bodies</b>
Scottish Government – Agriculture Policy Division
Scottish Government – Natural Resources Division
Forestry and Land Scotland
Scottish Forestry
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
NatureScot
Historic Environment Scotland
<b>Other Organisations</b>
Bracken Control Group
Scottish Land and Estates
The Heather Trust
National Farmers Union Scotland
Nature Friendly Farming Network
RSPB
Scottish Environment Link