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To All Members of the Scottish Parliament

Dear MSP,

I write on behalf of Animal Concern members and supporters in every constituency in Scotland.

Tomorrow, Thursday April 23rd, you have the chance to debate proposals to create new legislation to bring strict controls over the ownership and use of air weapons in Scotland.

This is something I know a bit about having first campaigned against airgun misuse as an activist with the fledgling Friends of the Earth (Scotland) in the 1970s. Some of you may be long enough in the tooth to remember a man who supported our campaign, Mr. Frankie Vaughan, whom I met when he was in Glasgow to combat the gang culture in Easterhouse. Sadly one of the reasons you have the chance to debate this issue is due to the death of a young boy killed by an airgun pellet in Easterhouse 10 years ago last month.

I can think of only two legitimate reasons for owning an air weapon. The first is to take part in competition target shooting. Serious target shooters use specialist airguns which are expensive and unlikely to be used in anti-social activities. Such users should be allowed licenses to own such weapons which, when not in use, should be kept under lock and key preferably on the secure premises of target shooting gun clubs.

In my opinion the only other legitimate use of airguns is in pest control. By pest control I mean the shooting of rats and mice inside homes and premises used for food storage and preparation. Under such conditions shooting is more humane than some forms of trapping (for example glue boards used to trap mice and which should be made illegal) and poisoning. Not only can poisons cause a slow and painful death there is the risk of secondary casualties when pet cats or dogs and wild animals and birds scavenge on the carcasses of poisoned rodents. However before resorting to using airguns pest controllers should be legally obliged to try all available methods of exclusion and deterrence to resolve the situation.

It is guesstimated that there are as many as 500,000 air weapons in private ownership in Scotland. Many are used by rural and urban criminals to kill or injure tens of thousands of wild, pet and farm animals and birds every year. Airguns are also used to cause damage to property and in armed robberies and assaults. They are also involved in many accidents which blind, maim and occasionally kill children and adults.

If you have five minutes please read our airgun factsheet <http://www.animalconcern.org/guns.pdf> It was last updated ten years ago but the situation hasn't really improved since then.

You can help greatly improve the situation by taking part in the creation of a new law to reduce the number of airguns in Scotland from half a million to perhaps under a thousand owned by responsible people and used for legitimate purposes.

Yours sincerely,
John F. Robins