



# IFA

## Submission to the Department of Justice Regarding the Consultation on the Reports of the Firearm Expert Committee

The Irish Farmers' Association - June 2023



**IFA**  
COUNTRYSIDE

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## Introduction

The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) is the largest national representative organisation in the country, with approximately 71,000 members in 940 branches nationwide. IFA Countryside is a division of IFA which represents individuals and groups who participate in countryside pursuits such as shooting, fishing and walking.

IFA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the consultation on the Reports of the Firearm Expert Committee.

As our organisations are deeply rooted in the rural fabric of Ireland, we possess an intimate understanding of the unique challenges faced by our members and their specific needs.

IFA and IFA Countryside have garnered invaluable insights into the practicalities and realities of firearm usage within rural contexts. It is this wealth of knowledge that forms the foundation of our submission.

## Executive Summary

Shooting has a multifaceted significance in Ireland and transcends mere recreational activity. It serves as an essential tool for effective agriculture and wildlife management, playing a crucial role in the lives of farmers and rural communities. It is vital to recognise the significance of allowing farmers and their agents to continue carrying out vermin control activities without undue burdens. Beyond its practical significance in pest control and preserving agricultural livelihoods, shooting holds a cherished place as a social activity that fosters camaraderie, community, and personal well-being. It contributes to the preservation of rural traditions, bolsters the social and economic well-being of farming communities, and raises funds for charitable causes.

The shooting community are already facing a myriad of challenges such as restrictions on lead ammunition, avian influenza and the opposition from anti-hunting protestors. There exists a sentiment among some enthusiasts that the omission of their voices in discussions pertaining to firearms regulation can be perceived as an indirect affront to their cherished sport. It is important to recognise and acknowledge the legitimate concerns of these individuals, whose passion and dedication to shooting sports are deeply ingrained in their lives. Going forward, by fostering an inclusive dialogue that incorporates diverse perspectives, we can ensure that the discussions surrounding firearms encompass a broad range of experiences, values, and aspirations.

Striking a balance between addressing concerns and protecting the rights of law-abiding shooters is vital. IFA advocates for a well-regulated licensing system that considers the interests of all stakeholders, ensuring a sustainable future for shooting and its contributions to Irish society. Improvements can be made to the licensing system for the benefit of all stakeholders. Standardised and consistent processes, specific firearm training for all personnel involved in overseeing firearms legislation and an online application system would improve consistency, efficiency, and fairness. By recognising the multifaceted benefits of shooting and fostering a well-regulated licensing system, we can nurture sustainable and thriving rural communities while maintaining public confidence.

## Importance of Shooting

**Vermin Control:** Farmers are the largest group of firearm holders in Ireland. It is imperative that the tools necessary for farmers and their agents to protect the health and welfare of their animals and production levels of crops on their farms continue to be available. Vermin control is of utmost importance for farmers, as vermin can cause considerable damage to both livestock and crop yields. The use of firearms is a key method for controlling vermin populations and ensuring the safety and health of farm animals, which in turn contributes to the farmers' livelihood and the overall agricultural economy. The responsible use of firearms for vermin control also reduces the need for chemical interventions, fostering a more sustainable and environmentally friendly approach to pest management in the Irish countryside.



Images: examples of crop damage by wild birds



Images: Wild Bird attack on lambs

In this context, the use of moderators and silencers is crucial for effective vermin control. These tools help minimise noise disturbance, preventing the startling of other livestock and reducing stress on the animals. This contributes to a more efficient and humane approach to vermin control on Irish farms. Therefore, IFA would recommend that moderators/silencers should be regarded as essential tools for vermin control and for deer management/control. These also help to mitigate against hearing loss and minimising disturbance to nearby communities.

**Controlling Overpopulation:** Deer management can help regulate animal populations particularly in cases where certain species have become overabundant in recent years such as deer. Whilst deer are a very much part of the Irish heritage and biodiversity, <sup>1</sup>without a national predator and without management, deer populations can grow to unsustainable levels resulting in significant ecological damage and economic loss. It is evident in certain areas, the current deer population is negatively impacting on environmental, economic and societal interests including damage to priority habitats, agricultural and forestry losses, disease transmission, animal welfare issues and road traffic incidents.

**Protecting Native Species:** The control of pests and predators makes a significant contribution to the conservation of many vulnerable species, particularly ground nesting birds. The protection of the curlew is just one example of how well-managed hunting, combined with focused conservation programs, can play a significant role in safeguarding native species and preserving Ireland's biodiversity. The Curlew Conservation programme is an example where local farmers and gun clubs work together to protect the iconic curlew through nest protection and predation control. Shooting clubs invest in habitat management & conservation projects contributing to the overall health of the countryside. The over-regulation or restriction of shooting could lead to significant ecological issues and place an additional burden on the government to manage these problems. Well managed hunting can mitigate against many threats to biodiversity.



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<sup>1</sup> Wicklow Uplands Council, Wicklow Deer Management Project (2019 – 2022) Final Report, March 2022

**Ecological Monitoring:** Hunting activities often require monitoring and research, which can provide valuable data on population dynamics, species behaviour, and habitat health. This information can be used to inform conservation strategies and management plans, leading to more effective protection of biodiversity. By engaging hunters in data collection and scientific observation, hunting can contribute to a better understanding of species' ecology and the impacts of human activities on their habitats.

**Conservation Funding:** Well-regulated hunting activities can generate revenue that can be used for conservation efforts. For instance, a proportion of hunting licenses fees, and taxes can be directed towards habitat restoration, wildlife management, and conservation projects. These funds can support initiatives like reforestation, wetland conservation, and species monitoring, which contribute to the overall protection of biodiversity in Ireland.

**Mental Health and Well-being:** Shooting activities, predominantly in rural regions of sometimes dispersed communities where the opportunity for social interaction may be limited, serve not solely as a form of leisure but extend to play a crucial role in social interaction and the bolstering of mental health for many of the inhabitants. This engagement often forms an intrinsic part of rural community dynamics, further evidenced by the active participation of shooting enthusiasts in charitable fundraising efforts as well as their significant contributions to local biodiversity projects.

The sport cultivates a spirit of camaraderie and community cohesiveness, establishing an environment conducive to mitigating feelings of isolation and loneliness — sentiments often exacerbated by the inherent geographic dispersion in rural landscapes. Moreover, the participation in shooting activities has ancillary benefits such as promoting physical fitness, acting as an effective medium for stress relief, and fostering an appreciation of the natural environment. The National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027 aims to increase participation in outdoor recreation in order to realise social, health and economic benefits. Shooting is a prime example of an activity that takes place in the natural environment. Shooting sports teach discipline and focus. Competitive shooting sports offer a platform for athletes to showcase their talent, represent their country in international competitions and bring pride to their communities.

**Revenue:** The sport also generates significant revenue through license fees, sporting goods sales, and tourism. <sup>2</sup>A study in Ireland (2007) show that hunters contribute €111.6m to the national economy of which 80-90% was spent in rural areas.



Image: Examples of expenditure by hunters

<sup>2</sup> Economic Impact of Game Shooting in the Republic of Ireland, David Scallan, NUI Galway



## Improvements to Licensing

There are a number of areas where the current licensing system can be improved for the benefit of all stakeholders:

- Implementation of an online firearm application system to streamline the process and make it more accessible for applicants.
- Issuance of a receipt or acknowledgement of application with a reference number to provide transparency and allow tracking the progress of applications.
- Addressing the issue of extensive discretion granted to Garda Superintendents in granting firearm licenses by advocating for a standardised and harmonised licensing process. This will help eliminate inconsistencies in license approvals, even across different counties. Collaboration with stakeholders will ensure fairness and accountability.
- Reformatting the firearms certificate to enhance its durability and include the holder's photograph for improved identification.
- Provision of specific firearm training for all personnel involved in overseeing firearms legislation to enhance their knowledge and competence in this area.
- Centralisation of the licensing authority within An Garda Síochána with appropriate input from local districts/divisions during the licensing process.
- Shifting the focus of licensing from individual firearms to licensing the individual person, removing limitations on the number of firearms a person may possess, use, or carry. The requirement should be satisfying a valid "good reason" and meeting necessary security standards.
- Establishment of a non-judicial appeals mechanism to address firearms licensing decisions, providing applicants with a fair recourse for review.
- Introducing a letter of intent to refuse a firearms license application, issued prior to a refusal decision, to allow applicants an opportunity to provide additional relevant information that could potentially influence the licensing decision.
- Farmers provide access to hunters to use their land. Mandating regulated insurance which includes liability cover as a prerequisite for firearm certification, ensures that all stakeholders are adequately protected. This measure would safeguard their interests and act as a safeguard by providing financial protection and mitigating the potential financial burden on individuals involved in firearm-related incidents.
- Shooting on private land in Ireland predominantly takes place through mutually agreed access arrangements between the gun club/shooter and the local landowner, fostering a well-established relationship built on trust. This informal understanding honours the farmer's right to determine whether written permission is necessary, acknowledging their discretion in choosing to require or forgo such documentation. Gun clubs provide an important service to local farmers through their knowledge and skill in effective vermin control. This valuable service helps protect crops and livestock which has a direct economic affect and also contributes to wildlife management.

Access should always be by agreement only. In recent times there have been a number of incidents nationwide involving gangs with dogs, illegal hunting and trespassing on lands with a

number of assaults, threats and intimidation warnings against farmers and landowners. Finding a middle ground that acknowledges the benefits of written permission while preserving the flexibility and trust within the shooting community would be ideal. This could involve promoting voluntary written agreements as a best practice, recognising the importance of open communication and understanding between shooters and landowners. Offering support and resources to facilitate the process, such as standardised templates or guidance, can help streamline the paperwork without imposing unnecessary burdens. Ultimately, striking a balance between formalisation and the existing trust-based approach is key to ensuring effective vermin control, preserving landowner autonomy, and fostering sustainable relationships between gun clubs and farmers. The aim should be to maintain the valuable services provided by gun clubs while addressing any concerns raised by both sides and working towards a mutually beneficial solution.

- Data collection and analysis: implement a centralised system to collect and analyse data on firearm licenses, including types of firearms owned and incidents involving firearms. This can help identify pattern trends and potential areas for improvement in the licensing process.
- Continuous evaluation and improvement: establish a mechanism for continuous evaluation and improvement of the firearm licensing system, including periodic reviews, feedback mechanisms and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances or emerging challenges.
- Firearm safety education: promote mandatory firearm safety education and training for first-time applicants
- Collaboration with stakeholders: foster regular communication and collaboration with relevant stakeholders to gather feedback and insights on the licensing system and make informed improvements.

While the establishment of an online public consultation platform is a step towards gathering users' views, it is crucial to emphasise the limitations it presents and that this platform alone will not be sufficient for effective decision-making. Feedback from our members highlights the challenges faced in completing the online survey. Many individuals found it difficult to provide meaningful input due to the technical terminology and the lack of opportunity to provide open-ended responses. This presents a significant barrier for meaningful participation. Meaningful participation and engagement of individuals and groups is vital to ensure a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives and to foster collaborative solutions.

Therefore, it is imperative to go beyond the online survey and actively involve people in face-to-face discussions, workshops or public forums eg the Firearm Conference held in Mullingar in 2008. These interactive settings provide an opportunity for stakeholders to engage in open dialogue, share their valuable expertise and experiences and contribute to informed decision-making

Going forward, the establishment of a firearm forum or consultancy panel will ensure an open dialogue between all relevant parties and facilitate the crafting of well-informed firearm legislation that takes into account the unique needs of rural communities and the shooting community.

## Club Membership & Authorisation

Expanding the framework of the current firearm licensing system to require authorisations for clubs by An Garda Síochána is a proposition that IFA would require further clarification and discussion. It is important to acknowledge that these clubs are already functioning effectively and play a significant role in rural Ireland. Imposing additional layers of authorisation may introduce unnecessary bureaucracy.

These clubs have already established their own internal regulations, safety protocols, and oversight mechanisms to ensure responsible firearm use among their members. They have demonstrated a commitment to promoting safety, fostering a sense of community, and providing valuable services such as vermin control and wildlife management. By functioning autonomously, these clubs have been able to adapt to the specific needs and circumstances of their local communities. This collaborative approach has proven to be efficient, practical, and responsive to the unique challenges faced by rural communities.

In some areas there may be limited availability of shooting clubs. This could pose a challenge for individuals living in remote rural areas or urban environments.

On the other hand, club membership would allow for a level of oversight and accountability. Club officials can monitor the behaviour and conduct of members, ensuring that they adhere to club rules and regulations. Thus, helping to maintain high standards of conduct and responsible firearm ownership.

Expanding the involvement of An Garda Síochána in the authorisation process could introduce unnecessary delays, administrative burdens, and potential inconsistencies in the management of these clubs. It would require additional resources and monitoring to ensure compliance and proper oversight.

## Different Types of Firearm Certificates

IFA disagrees with the recommendation of introducing different types of firearm certificates aligned with the purpose for which the firearm has been sought. While the intention behind this proposal may be to provide greater specificity and control, implementing such a system would be impractical and unworkable in the Irish context.

1. **Administrative Complexity:** Introducing multiple types of firearm certificates would significantly increase administrative complexity for both applicants and licensing authorities. The process of evaluating and categorizing firearms based on their intended purpose would require extensive resources, expertise, and time. This could lead to delays and backlogs in the licensing process, undermining the timely acquisition of firearms for legitimate purposes.
2. **Ambiguity and Interpretation:** Determining the exact purpose for which a firearm is sought can be subjective and open to interpretation. Differentiating between categories such as target shooting, limited hunting and shooting wildlife, or hunting and shooting wildlife may create ambiguity and disagreements regarding the appropriate categorisation of firearms. This could result in inconsistencies in the application and approval process, leading to confusion and potential legal challenges.

3. **Fluid Nature of Firearms Use:** Firearms are versatile tools that can serve multiple purposes depending on the situation and need. Restricting firearm certificates to specific purposes fails to acknowledge the dynamic nature of firearm use. Many individuals engage in a variety of shooting activities, including target shooting, vermin control, and hunting, which may require different firearms based on factors such as distance, accuracy, and calibre. Limiting firearms to specific certificates may impede individuals' ability to adapt to changing circumstances and restrict their lawful activities.
4. **Practicality for Rural Areas:** Rural areas in Ireland often have diverse wildlife management and vermin control needs. Farmers, landowners, and gamekeepers face a range of challenges in protecting their livestock, crops, and natural habitats. Restricting firearm certificates to specific purposes may hinder their ability to effectively address these challenges. The current licensing system allows for flexibility, enabling individuals to utilise firearms based on the specific needs and circumstances of their land and the surrounding environment.
5. **Potential Disincentive for Participation:** Introducing complex categorisations for firearm certificates may discourage individuals from engaging in shooting sports or other legitimate firearm-related activities. The increased complexity, associated costs, and potential limitations imposed by specific-purpose certificates could deter individuals from pursuing these activities, resulting in a negative impact on sports shooting clubs, vermin control efforts, and overall participation in responsible firearm use.

Rather than implementing a rigid system of different types of firearm certificates, it is more practical and effective to maintain a flexible licensing framework that ensures appropriate background checks, training requirements, and adherence to safety regulations. This approach allows individuals to use firearms responsibly while accommodating the diverse needs and activities related to firearms in Ireland.

### **Limit on the number and types of firearms a person may hold**

It is important to note that the vast majority of firearm owners in Ireland are law-abiding citizens who adhere to regulations and guidelines. Imposing limits on the number of firearms they can possess may unfairly penalise responsible individuals while doing little to address any potential public safety concerns. Instead, the focus should be on effective background checks, licensing procedures, and ongoing monitoring to identify individuals who may pose a risk to public safety.

Rural areas in Ireland often have unique challenges and rely on responsible firearm ownership for various purposes. Limiting the number and types of firearms individuals can possess could adversely impact rural communities, where firearms play a significant role in protecting agricultural interests and maintaining a balance between wildlife conservation and agricultural practices.

Imposing a limit on the number of firearms a person can possess fails to recognise the diverse needs and circumstances of firearm owners. A person may possess multiple firearms due to participation in various disciplines of shooting.

### **Graded Security Standards**

Balancing the need for enhanced security measures with practicality and individual circumstances is crucial when considering graded security arrangements for multiple firearm holders. The aim should be

to promote responsible firearm ownership while addressing legitimate security concerns in a manner that is reasonable, effective, and proportional to the associated risks.

It is important to consider that multiple firearm holders may have different reasons for owning multiple firearms, such as different shooting disciplines, hunting purposes, or specific needs for vermin control. Applying a standardised graded security arrangement without considering individual circumstances could be overly restrictive and may not effectively address the actual security concerns.

## **Training and Qualifications**

IFA acknowledges the importance of appropriate training for first-time applicants seeking firearm certificates in Ireland. However, training options should not be limited to taking place at specific shooting ranges. There are existing models and courses that can effectively provide comprehensive training, and oversight for such training can be conducted jointly by the Department of Justice and An Garda Síochána.

The Department of Justice and An Garda Síochána can establish a system of accreditation and certification for training providers to ensure that the programs offered meet the necessary standards and align with national requirements. This would allow for consistent quality and adherence to training guidelines across different training models. The Department of Justice and An Garda Síochána can play a crucial role in overseeing the training process, ensuring that it meets national standards and guidelines for firearm competency and safety.

Implementing a mandatory minimum requirement for firearm certificate holders to spend a specified number of hours on a range each year may not be the most practical approach. While the intention behind such a requirement may be to ensure ongoing proficiency and safety, it is important to consider the diverse circumstances and needs of firearm owners.

Requiring a set number of range hours fails to account for the varying availability of ranges across different regions, especially in rural areas where access to suitable facilities may be limited. It may place an undue burden on firearm owners who have limited access to ranges due to geographical constraints or other logistical challenges

## **Oversight of Licensing**

In the context of licensing considerations, subjecting shooting clubs to authorisation when a firearm is sought on the basis of club membership could create unnecessary barriers for law-abiding citizens who are members of legitimate shooting clubs. It is essential to strike a balance between ensuring safety and preserving the rights and freedoms of responsible firearm owners.

Limited Club Options: Requiring club membership as a prerequisite may limit individuals' choices, especially if there are only a few clubs in a given area. This could create a situation where individuals are forced to join a specific club, regardless of their personal preferences or compatibility with that particular club.

**Accessibility and Affordability:** Some clubs may have stringent membership requirements or high fees, making it difficult for certain individuals, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, to access and afford membership. This could disproportionately affect individuals who are interested in legitimate shooting practices but are unable to meet the financial obligations associated with club membership.

**Administrative Burden:** Implementing and managing a system that requires authorisation through club membership can introduce administrative complexities and increased workload for both clubs and authorities involved in the licensing process. It may require additional resources and monitoring to ensure compliance and proper oversight.

It is important to consider these potential problems and strike a balance between regulating firearm ownership and ensuring accessibility for individuals engaged in legitimate shooting practices.

Similarly, IFA would not see the merit of introducing specific fees for different forms of clubs. Imposing additional fees could deter individuals from participating in recreational shooting activities and unfairly burden law-abiding citizens who already comply with existing regulations. It is important to promote inclusivity and affordability within the shooting community without introducing unnecessary complexity or financial barriers that could discourage participation in shooting sports.

IFA believe that subjecting clay target shooting and shotgun ranges to inspections may not be the most effective approach for ensuring their safe and responsible operation. Instead of burdening these clubs with additional regulations, a more constructive approach could involve setting guidelines and providing training on how to run an effective clay target club. These guidelines can cover essential aspects such as safety protocols, range management, target handling, and proper maintenance of equipment. By focusing on education and training, clubs can develop a culture of safety and responsibility among their members, fostering an environment where best practices are followed and potential risks are minimised. Additionally, offering resources and support to clubs in implementing these guidelines can further enhance their capacity to maintain high standards of safety and professionalism. This approach recognises the expertise and commitment of clay target shooting and shotgun clubs while providing them with the necessary tools to ensure a safe and enjoyable shooting experience for all members.

On the topic of electronic registers for Registered Firearm Dealers, IFA would see merit with this recommendation. Introducing electronic registers would streamline record-keeping processes, enhance efficiency, and ensure accurate and up-to-date information is readily accessible. This move aligns with the digital transformation efforts in various sectors and can contribute to improved regulatory oversight.

While the principle of ensuring safe storage during transportation is important, the additional storage requirements for multiple firearms should be clearly defined. It is crucial to strike a balance between practicality and safety, taking into account the specific circumstances and needs of firearm owners.

## Conclusion

Shooting plays a crucial role in the lives of farmers and rural communities, serving as an indispensable tool for effective land and wildlife management. For farmers, shooting provides an essential means of pest control, allowing them to mitigate the significant economic losses caused by crop damage and livestock predation. By responsibly managing populations of pests and predators, farmers can protect their livelihoods and ensure the sustainable production of food. Additionally, shooting offers an effective method for controlling invasive species, safeguarding native biodiversity, and promoting a balanced ecosystem. The cultural heritage associated with shooting is deeply intertwined with the agricultural fabric of Ireland, contributing to the preservation of rural traditions and bolstering the social and economic well-being of farming communities across the nation.

In addition to its practical significance, shooting holds a pivotal place as a cherished social activity that greatly contributes to people's quality of life, fostering a sense of camaraderie, community, and personal well-being. Shooting sports and recreational activities provide opportunities for individuals to connect with like-minded enthusiasts, participate in competitions, and enjoy the natural beauty of Ireland's countryside. These social interactions not only promote mental and physical well-being but also create a support network where knowledge and skills are shared, fostering a strong sense of belonging and solidarity. Moreover, shooting events often serve as platforms for charitable endeavours, raising funds for local causes, conservation initiatives, and community development projects. Participation in shooting sports has been linked to improved mental health, enhanced concentration, and increased physical fitness. These positive outcomes contribute to a higher overall quality of life for individuals and communities.

It is important to acknowledge that the shooting community in Ireland already faces a myriad of challenges, including a ban on lead ammunition and the ongoing threat of avian influenza. These challenges have necessitated significant efforts to ensure the sustainability of shooting activities while simultaneously safeguarding environmental and public health. Moreover, it is important to note that shooters also encounter obstacles posed by anti-hunting protestors who actively oppose the traditions and practices associated with responsible and regulated hunting. In light of these existing challenges, further restrictions on firearm licenses would unduly burden law-abiding shooters, impeding their ability to contribute to conservation efforts, pest control, and the rural economy. Striking a delicate balance between addressing legitimate concerns and protecting the rights and interests of shooters is paramount to maintaining the vitality of shooting traditions in Ireland.

While acknowledging the importance of firearm regulation, there are areas where the current licensing system can be improved to benefit all stakeholders. These improvements include the implementation of an online firearm application system, standardised licensing processes and enhanced training for personnel involved in overseeing firearms legislation. Standardised licensing processes are crucial for ensuring consistency and reliability in the application of legislation. Varying interpretations of the legislation lead to different outcomes and treatment for similar cases, causing inefficiencies and potential unfairness.

In conclusion, shooting activities in Ireland play a vital role in vermin control, wildlife management, rural community dynamics, mental health, and the economy. Balancing responsible firearm regulation with the

recognition of the significant benefits shooting brings to various aspects of Irish society is crucial for fostering sustainable and thriving rural communities.

A well-regulated licensing system considers the interests and perspectives of various stakeholders, including firearm owners and relevant authorities. By striking a balance between individual rights, public safety, and community well-being, it acknowledges the diverse needs and concerns of different groups, fostering a cooperative and inclusive approach to firearms regulation.

Maintaining public confidence in the licensing system is crucial. A well-regulated process that is transparent, fair, and consistent helps build trust and credibility.



## CASE STUDY

### Rathcormac Game and Wildlife Club – Integrating Conservation and Community Engagement



Founded in 1971 as Rathcormac Parish Gun Club, Rathcormac Game and Wildlife Club has emerged as a remarkable example of the significance of gun and game clubs in local communities. Situated in the picturesque village of Rathcormac in north Cork, this club has not only established itself as a hub for shooting enthusiasts but has also embraced a deep commitment to environmental conservation, making a positive impact on the surrounding area.

Recognising the decline and loss of wildlife habitat in the region, Rathcormac Game and Wildlife Club took a proactive stance by purchasing a six-acre field and through the club's own funding and various grants, they turned it into Corrin Nature Reserve. This beautiful reserve, located on the southern slope of Corrin Hill, boasts 1000 meters of walkways and is a combination of natural habitat and carefully managed areas designed to support local wildlife. It is a testament to the club's dedication to environmental preservation.

**"AS A LOCAL GUN CLUB WITH A STRONG COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINING OUR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT, WE TAKE CONSERVATION SERIOUSLY, AND WE'RE PROUD OF THE WAY WE HAVE INTEGRATED OUR CONSERVATION AND RESTOCKING WORK INTO THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CLUB."**

Integral to their conservation efforts is the planting of game crops. Additionally, the club cultivates vibrant wildflower meadows that bloom during the summer, attracting diverse flora and fauna. These initiatives demonstrate the club's commitment to creating a sustainable ecosystem that supports local wildlife throughout the year. One of Rathcormac Game and Wildlife Club's most notable undertakings is the re-introduction of the native grey partridge, an endangered species.

The club's dedication to community engagement is equally commendable. Welcoming visitors, groups, schools, and clubs to the Corrin Nature Reserve, Rathcormac Game and Wildlife Club encourages people from all walks of life to appreciate and learn about the local environment. This open invitation fosters a sense of stewardship and cultivates a love for nature among visitors, contributing to the club's overarching mission of creating a harmonious relationship between the community and the natural world.

Rathcormac Game and Wildlife Club's commitment to charitable causes further highlights their role as a socially responsible community organisation. Each year, the club sow sunflowers for their Annual Sunflower Day, an event held in aid of charities such as Pieta House and Marymount Hospice. This philanthropic initiative not only raises funds for worthy causes but also showcases the club's dedication to using their platform to benefit the wider community.

The case of Rathcormac Game and Wildlife Club exemplifies the vital role that gun and game clubs play in local communities. By embracing a holistic approach that combines shooting sports with conservation efforts, the club has become a beacon of environmental stewardship and community engagement. Their dedication to sustaining the local environment, integrating conservation into their activities, and supporting charitable causes, demonstrates how gun and game clubs can make a significant and positive impact beyond their core pursuits. Rathcormac Game and Wildlife Club serves as an inspiration for similar organisations, highlighting the importance of preserving nature, fostering community connections, and contributing to the overall well-being of local communities.



Images: Rathcormac Game & Wildlife Club

## CASE STUDY



ABGN Gun Club, founded in 1969, stands as a remarkable example of a club dedicated to both shooting practices and conservation efforts. Comprised of 94 voluntary members, the club has established strong relationships with landowners, working collaboratively for crop protection and vermin control. The club actively engages in various conservation initiatives, including red grouse conservation, heather management, and the establishment of duck ponds. They have also been involved in tree planting endeavours and the restocking of duck and pheasant populations.

ABGN Gun Club not only focuses on conservation but also takes part in fundraising and charity work to support their initiatives. They organise events such as quiz nights, auctions, and a winter wonderland during Christmas. The proceeds from these activities contribute to their conservation projects and enable them to give back to the community. Additionally, the club offers safety courses and extends support to other clubs, fostering a sense of collaboration within the shooting community.

The club actively promotes environmental awareness by distributing 700 trees to their members, neighbouring farmers, and local residents. By encouraging tree planting, they contribute to the enhancement of green spaces and support efforts to combat deforestation. Moreover, the club takes proactive measures for heather management, dedicating three days on the hill to cut heather at their own expense. These initiatives demonstrate their commitment to the preservation and management of important habitats.

Regarding the current recommendations put forth by the Firearms Expert Committee (FEC), ABGN Gun Club believes that the hunting community should be an integral part of the collaborative efforts. However, they express their concerns about the public consultation survey, finding it confusing and not user-friendly. By highlighting these concerns, the club emphasises the importance of effective and inclusive communication channels to ensure that the voices and experiences of the hunting community are adequately represented in decision-making processes.

The ABGN Gun Club's long-standing commitment to conservation, voluntary work, fundraising, and community engagement exemplifies the positive impact that shooting clubs can have on both biodiversity and local communities. Their dedication to wildlife management, habitat restoration, and educational initiatives serves as an inspiration for other clubs and demonstrates the potential for collaboration between shooting enthusiasts and conservationists.



Images: ABGN Gun Club