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Our ref: PO249121

6 October 2011

From Rt Hon Jim Paice MP
Minister of State for Agriculture and Food

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Paice". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Thank you for your letter of 28 June enclosing a report on the achievements of the Lead Ammunition Group since its inception in March 2010. I apologise for the delay in replying.

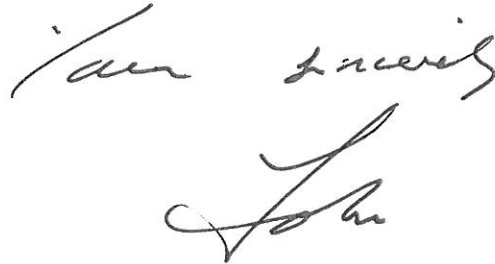
I welcome the Group's report and wanted to express my gratitude for the work and efforts undertaken by the Group to date in making progress with what is a complex issue. I think there is considerable value in a group of experts, independent of Government, coming together to offer a broad, informed consideration of the possible impacts of lead ammunition. I note the Group has conducted its business without any funding from Defra and I echo your thanks to the members of the Group, and the organisations to which some belong, for working in this way.

The Group has made some notable achievements to date including the establishment of a public website that has provided a useful interface and source of information for the wider public with an interest in the issue. Most significant perhaps is the establishment of a Primary Evidence Subgroup (which I note has evolved to include risk assessment as part of its remit) that seems to be getting to grips with the critical task of collating and classifying the evidence. I think the writing of risk assessments for human health, wildlife and livestock is the right way forward to inform any options for risk management that prove necessary based upon the analysis of the collated evidence.

I accept that it is difficult to make any predictions about when the first of the risk assessments, on possible significant human health impacts, will be peer reviewed. This is a complex area and it is wise to await the outcomes of other research, particularly the related Food Standards Agency Scotland research, before completing the Group's own risk assessment. I also note that the Group has not to date identified any additional significant risks to human health from the use of lead ammunition but that of course the risk assessment is ongoing.

I continue to support and value the work of the Group and with this in mind I would like to invite the Group to continue its work for an additional year and, if you are prepared to do so, I would like to invite you to continue to Chair the Group during this period. On this basis I would welcome suggestions for new members to replace Dr Avery, Dr Tapper and Mr Gane who have sadly left the Group, and an indication of when final advice and recommendations may be available.

I note your concerns regarding the withdrawal of Defra officials from providing secretariat support for the Group but other Departmental pressures have meant we are not able to reinstate this support at present. I hope this letter reassures you and the Group that the work you are taking forward remains important and I look forward to receiving your advice and recommendations in due course.

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

RT HON JIM PAICE MP

P.S. I had not seen this when we met on Monday!