

Adjournment Debate, Westminster 01/04/25

Digest by Action Against Foxhunting.

These are key quotations and extracts from the debate in Parliament, secured by Perran Moon, MP for Cambourne and Redruth.

We have added titles, so you can find them easily.

The names of the MPs who spoke follow the quotations.

Most people object to the hunting of wild mammals:

“that opinion [as above] is shared by many rural residents.”

Perran Moon

Hunts have a negative effect on rural residents and their animals:

“The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals says that out of control hounds on trail hunts have harmed people, pets and themselves in residential areas.”

Irene Campbell

(North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab)

Trail hunting is fox hunting

“On the surface, it appears to be a harmless activity. However, there is now overwhelming evidence to suggest that trail hunting has become a thinly veiled pretence for illegal hunting activities under the Hunting Act.”

Perran Moon

Evidence of illegal hunting

“...the Heythrop Hunt and the Warwickshire Hunt which crosses the county border, have been caught red-handed hunting live foxes”

Sean Woodcock

(Banbury) (Lab)

Artificial earths – structures build and maintained by hunts to encourage foxes to breed

“It is a complete nonsense to suggest that fox hunting is of any use in terms of pest control. It is not.” [Mr Moon said he had cleared land used for artificial earths].

Perran Moon

The only objection to banning trail hunting was non-specific

“The hunting community would dispute some of what has been said tonight.”

Jim Shannon

(Strangford) (DUP)

The right to hunt is unacceptable because of the animal cruelty involved

“...the evidence and the science suggest that the cruelty to the animal being pursued far outweighs the pleasure the hunt will give human beings.”

Perran Moon

The extent of the law-breaking

“The fact that 46% of registered trail hunts end up chasing a fox proves that the law needs tightening up and that we need tougher sentencing.”

Rachael Maskell
(York Central) (Lab/Co-op)

The hunts have already had their views heard in the leaked webinar

“The point was made earlier that the voices of those who get their kicks out of chasing wild animals for sport need to be heard, and indeed they have been: we have already heard that the leaders of trail hunts admit that they are, indeed, a smokescreen. They have used that word themselves to describe what goes on with trail hunts.”

Andrew George
(St Ives) (LD)

The extent of the law-breaking

“..there is significant evidence that trail hunts often lead to the unlawful hunting of foxes and other wild animals.”

Perran Moon

Trespass

“Many landowners continue to suffer horse and hound trespass, and uncontrolled hounds regularly end up spilling out on to roads, causing a danger to road users, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Irene Campbell).”

Perran Moon

Trails being laid where foxes live

“Trail hunts are often deliberately laid in areas inhabited by foxes, increasing the likelihood of hounds disturbing, chasing and killing a fox or other animals when the scent of live quarry is picked up.”

Perran Moon

The extent of the law-breaking

“These are not isolated incidents; they are part of a broader pattern of behaviour that undermines the intent of the Hunting Act claim of trail hunting was used as a defence. The evidence suggests that the scent trail is often a formality, with hunts continuing to chase and kill wildlife.”

Perran Moon

When the law changes, will the hunts use drag hunting to cover up the illegal hunting of foxes? If so, why not ban all of it?

“Would it not then be possible for drag hunting to be used in some way as a cover for illegal fox hunting? If so, is not this an endless process, and should he not come out and say straightaway that he wants every form of this activity stopped?”

Sir Julian Lewis
(New Forest East) (Con)

Labour isn't targeting the horse-riding element of rural communities

"It is really important that this is not seen to be a witch hunt against people who want to have a hack across the countryside with dogs on a specific and pre-planned route. It is a really important nuance within rural communities that we are not against all forms of horse riding."

Perran Moon

Problem with the law as it is.

"...the existing law is often unable sufficiently to hold to account those who flout the regulations under the guise of trail hunting."

Perran Moon

Enforcement of the current law

"Moreover, enforcement in the field has proven difficult."

Perran Moon

Animal welfare, including domestic and farmed animals

"The impact on animal welfare is significant, with wild animals, particularly foxes, being forced to run long distances while being relentlessly pursued, after which they are torn limb from limb while still alive by a pack of uncontrollable hounds. The suffering does not stop there. Non-target animals, including domestic pets and livestock, have also been disturbed, attacked and even killed when hunts veer off course, creating havoc in residential areas and rural communities."

Perran Moon

Cross-party support

"Support for banning trail hunting crosses party lines. MPs from various political parties, including the Conservative party, the Liberal Democrats and the Green party, have all expressed concern over trail hunting's role in perpetuating illegal hunting activities."

Perran Moon

The moral case

"The moral case for ending trail hunting is clear: it is inconsistent with the values of a modern, compassionate society that respects animal welfare."

Perran Moon

Damage to the environment

"Hunting, whether through traditional or trail methods, often takes place in areas of natural beauty and fragile ecosystems. The disturbance caused by hounds and hunters can have lasting effects on the local wildlife, disrupt natural habitats, and lead to long-term ecological damage. Given the increasing concern over biodiversity and the need to protect our natural environment, banning trail hunting would be a positive step in safeguarding the UK's wildlife and habitats."

Perran Moon

Send them to prison, and removing exemptions

"That means banning trail hunting, removing exemptions that enable illegal hunting and introducing custodial sentences for those who break the law."

Perran Moon

We should ban everything they do

“While a pledge to ban trail hunting is welcome, I fear that it could be insufficient. If legislation focuses solely on the term “trail hunting”, hunts may adopt new euphemisms to exploit existing loopholes to continue their activities. Does my hon. Friend agree that effective reform must go beyond a symbolic ban and address the entire framework that enables illegal hunting to carry on?”

Neil Duncan-Jordan
(Poole) (Lab)

Time limit, notifiable offence and burden of proof (explanation of this below)

“In addition to those changes, we must extend the time available to charge in illegal hunting¹ cases, reverse the burden of proof of compliance with exemptions², and make hunting a notifiable offence.³”

Perran Moon

Tradition

“Hunting was and is perceived to be a traditional rural activity, but that does not mean it is right. It is wrong.”

Perran Moon

Defra Reply. Ban on trail hunting confirmed. Consultation this year.

“... the Government are committed to going further by putting in place a ban on trail hunting. My hon. Friend asked for a specific timeline. I am afraid that, at the moment, I cannot give him that, but I want to assure Members that we are working to move this forward and will deliver a thorough consultation later this year to ensure that the legislation that is brought forward is effective in practice and that its impact is understood.”

The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs
(Daniel Zeichner)

¹ Currently, the time limit is 6 months. Some cases have been dropped because it has taken longer than 6 months to gather enough evidence to charge.

² Currently, hunts don't have to prove they are exempt hunting when they are taken to court. The prosecution has to prove it. Stag hunts are flouting an exemption, and police refuse to challenge them.

³ Illegal hunting is a non-notifiable offence. This means they don't count in police statistics. It also means that the offence is seen as trivial. If it becomes notifiable, police are more likely to spend time and money on prosecutions.