

The Sportsman's Association of Great Britain & Northern Ireland



FIGHTING FOR FAIR AND EFFECTIVE FIREARMS LEGISLATION
Quarterly Newsletter 30/12/2020

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New Year Greetings to You All

Wishing you all a warm and cosy festive season, and a wonderful New Year to come. 2021 has got to be better than the year just gone, so with that in mind I will be putting a calendar of events on the website, do let me know dates and activities that you would like published.



Shooting has Resumed in a Fashion 😊

Whilst some of us can resume shooting, with the four home countries having different tiered systems, and with different local restrictions within a tier, it has become even more confusing to know what is and is not possible. As I typed this the NRA and NSRA had conflicting interpretations of indoor shooting under tier three in England. Please check the regulations being applied in your area before you head out to the range, and please keep checking the websites for your particular activity for the latest advice.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/furtherbusinesses-and-premises-to-close-guidance>.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation> and includes advice for providers of facilities on cleaning, social distancing, and protection for staff to help venues get back up and running safely.

[Coronavirus legislation and guidance on the law | GOV.WALES](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): local protection levels - gov. scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations>

NRA <https://nra.org.uk/news/>

NSRA <https://www.nsra.co.uk/index.php/119-frontpage/2795-the-nsra-and-lord-roberts-centre>

BASC <https://basc.org.uk/coronavirus/firearms/>

CPSA <https://www.cpsa.co.uk/news/coronavirus-covid-19>

GTA <https://gtaltd.co.uk/news/shooting-grounds-and-ranges-opening-in-england/78>

MLAGB <https://www.mlagb.com/news/>

UKPSA <https://www.ukpsa.co.uk/news/covid-19-coronavirus-update/>

HBSA <https://sites.google.com/site/hbsauk/home/latest-news>

CA <https://www.countryside-alliance.org/covid-19-hub>

Good news, the NSRA are re-opening parts of the Lord Roberts Centre having been closed since the first lockdown.

Firearms Safety Consultation

The Consultation on Firearms Safety covering Security of High Muzzle Energy Rifles, Air Weapons, Miniature Rifle Ranges and Home Loading has been published, please access it and respond to by 16/2/2021, using the following link below.

Sportsman's Association is submitting a reply and BSSC are doing the same. Unfortunately, they want online responses only, or will accept a downloaded word document version which can be emailed to them. No postal responses.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/937622/firearms_Safety_Consultation_Paper.pdf

European Firearms Requirements from 1/1/2021 – Published 16/12/2020

GB Residents, who want to travel to the EU with their firearms or shotguns will no longer be able to apply for a European Firearms Pass (EFP) from 1 January 2021. You will also no longer be able to use an existing EFP to travel to the EU with your firearm or shotgun. Instead, you should check the firearms licensing requirements of the EU country you are travelling to or through, ahead of travelling. You will need to apply for consent in line with these requirements and applicable import/export controls. These requirements will also apply if you will be in an EU country with your firearm, covered by an EFP, from 1st January.

Visitors Permits – You should continue to apply to your local UK police force for a visitor's permit if you are sponsoring an EU visitor who is bringing a firearm to the UK. Permits issued before the UK leaves the EU will remain valid until they expire.

It will no longer be a legal requirement for EU visitors to GB to produce a valid EFP in support of their application, but it will remain open for them to do so as one form of evidence of their suitability to bring a firearm into GB.

Northern Ireland – The situation will be different in Northern Ireland where, in line with the Northern Ireland Protocol, NI certificate holders will still be able to obtain and use EFPs.

The BSSC will continue to press for recognition of EU citizens EFP's with regard to visitors permits, and for our Government and the EU Commission to adopt a Switzerland-style bilateral arrangement on the EFP.

Offensive Weapons Act Surrender and Compensation Scheme

The scheme is open from 10/12/2020 to **9/2/2021**. Guidance and compensation forms can be downloaded from the following link, including the list of the police stations at which you can hand in your rifles. If you can not download the forms please contact me for a printed copy.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/offensive-weapons-act-surrender-and-compensation-scheme>.

The rifles which have been prohibited are: *any rifle with a chamber from which empty cartridge cases are extracted using energy from propellant gas, or energy imparted to a spring or other energy storage device by propellant gas, other than a rifle which is chambered for .22 rim-fire cartridges.*

For example, the Caledonian Arms VZ58 MARS rifles in 5.56mm or 7.62x39mm calibres, or the Southern Gun Company Lever Release rifles in 9mm or .45". Shotguns, .22" semi-automatic firearms, underlever rifles and straight-pull rifles are not included in the prohibition.

Lead Shot Over Wetlands

The EU Regulations for Lead Shot over Wetlands was approved by the REACH committee on 3/9/20 and went to the European Parliament and Council for scrutiny, deadline 5th Dec. A motion calling for the errors in the proposed regulations to be fixed within the REACH committee was tabled, this motion failed. Changes that have been agreed, if I have understood the flurry of emails correctly are:

- 1) Buffer zone down from 400m to 100m.
- 2) "Possession" of lead shot to "carrying" lead shot.
- 3) Guidance on the definition of wetlands to be decided by individual member states, in line with proportionality in the context of AEWA (waterbird conservation).

The regulations were not published in the European Journal before 11/12/20 so are not automatically applicable to the UK as the transition period will be over before they are made law in the EU. The text of the regulation is here with translations in the different languages: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/comitology-register/screen/documents/064660/6/consult>

However, if our government does commit to adopt these regulations we must convince them not to, unless we are sure that all the concerns based on the legal uncertainty of the definitions of wetlands, and the presumption of innocence which is a fundamental right in law have been properly addressed. We have had legislation in place since 1999 banning the use of lead shot over wetlands to protect wildlife. This has been successful on coastal wetlands but needs greater compliance inland.

The following link may prove helpful in forming arguments for you letter to your MP. <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/the-lead-shot-over-wetlands-proposal-is-unworkable>

Jonathan Djanogly MP, Chairman of the BSSC, has written to Nigel Huddleston MP, Minister for Sport arguing the case for Clay Target Shooting grounds and Team GB Olympians, future and current, where only lead shot is permitted under international rules. He has also written to George Eustice the Secretary of State for the Environment asking his department not to adopt these regulations.

EU Proposals to Ban All Lead Ammunition

The proposals on the restriction of all lead in ammunition (gunshots and bullets) and fishing tackle, being prepared by the European Chemical Agency have been postponed until 15/1/2021, as Covid-19 restrictions have not enabled many of the interested parties to respond to information requests. Black Powder and Muzzle Loading in general may be one area where the ECHA accept that there are no reasonable alternatives to lead, but they are not accepting any exceptions for target shooting.

However, one report produced by FITASC, the international governing body for all non-Olympic clay target disciplines, puts forward a very good argument for keeping lead shot over steel. It is a very thorough paper comparing the composition of the materials used in both, their different behaviours, and from a contamination point of view the effect of shooting steel shot on grounds already covered in lead shot.

"Our studies show that shooting steel shot on soils containing lead shot will acidify the soil at the site, accelerate lead corrosion and promote lead transport that will facilitate the migration of lead, antimony and other heavy metals from the contaminated site and deposit them in solution further downstream. Because they are more mobile, heavy metals will also migrate more easily to the water table. Furthermore, commercial steel shot generates manganese and nickel as additional undesirable pollutants. The presence of manganese in particular is known to amplify the toxic effects of existing lead pollution."

FITASC do suggest PURE LEAD ammunition as environmentally sound, or lead protected by a corrosion resistant finish, as used in the USA, as a future possibility.

These EU proposals once ready will go to public consultation and to the Risk Assessment and Socio-Economic Assessment Committees which are expected to have submitted a combined opinion to the Commission by January 2022. Legislation could be passed later in the year. There are many obstacles both practical and technical to be overcome and FACE have an uphill task in stopping this legislation.

As all this will happen post the Brexit transition period, we may escape this for a while longer, but do not rest on your laurels as Labour MP Fleur Anderson tabled an amendment to the Environment Bill calling for a two-year phase out of all lead shot. It failed. DEFRA minister Rebecca Pow said *"The new clause falls short of what shooting organisations are calling for. Organisations such as BASC, the Moorland Association and various other countryside organisations, I engaged with a lot of them as a backbencher, are calling for an end within in five years to both lead and single-use plastics. They are talking about it seriously. It is critical government takes the right level of action through measures that are*

Underpinned by evidence, as always, and informed by further conversations with stakeholders. I am not sure that the honourable lady's proposal necessarily does that."

Steel Shot, a shooter's perspective...by Richard Calver, Association

Member

To start, what is this sudden fuss with steel shot?... Well, earlier this year an announcement was made to voluntarily phase out lead shot ammunition in the next five years. This registered with maybe 50% of shooters, but the implication of what this could mean for our sport was perhaps less understood.

So, what's the fuss? It essentially boils down to whether you use an English antique or vintage shotgun. To confuse shooters further – there are two types of steel load. "Standard steel moderate loads" are okay for most nitro proofed guns. "High powered steel loads" are not to be used in guns without a modern steel proof stamp!

So, lets break this down... It would appear that a few things are happening simultaneously, leaving the average shooter confused and anxious about whether their gun is future proofed for the changes.

1. Can steel be used in any shotgun?
2. Why can't we continue to use lead? What's wrong with lead?
3. Will the advent of steel cartridges devalue my gun or mean that I can't use it entirely? Is now the time to get rid of my gun?
4. Is steel really non-toxic?
5. What's wrong with Bismuth?

As a home loader and gun collector, I can say I have in part, found some of the problems with, and I hope solutions to, these questions. The answers are not entirely clear cut as there are variables at play, not least with the guns but also with the ammunition.

1. Starting with the guns. If like me you are using a Damascus barrelled nitro proofed English game gun, in my case a virtually unknown provincial maker, of sound quality but clearly over 140 years old, a $\frac{3}{4}$ choked bored gun chambered for 2.5" shells... we immediately have to ask the question, is shooting shot, that is physically harder than the gun's barrels, through its bores a good idea?
The answer should always be no! Even with a protective wad there can be some scratching as I found out to my gun's detriment.

It is my firm belief that there are three things to consider when shooting steel shot.

- a) the angle of your chambers forcing cones, if too steep you will end up with dimples or scratches forward of your gun's chamber.
- b) your chokes can't be overlooked, too tight and your barrel can bulge.
- c) the iron to steel ratio of your gun's barrels, the higher the steel content the stronger the barrel.

It has been my observation that steel shot, fired using moderate home loads, can be fired safely using a thick card or plastic wad through steel barrels no less than 30" thou thick with progressive or smoothly angled chokes and chamber forcing cones. The same can not be said of Damascus, particularly if the mix of your barrels has more iron than steel.

That said, if you reduce the shot charge and put a cone or triangular shaped piece of oasis flower arranging foam inside the shot column before crimping your cartridge down (paper cases are best) you can shoot it through full choke with few problems. However, this is again dependant on the barrels being used, the angle of choke and the forcing cones dimensions.



2. So why can't we continue to use lead?
 - a) Environmental concerns, lead is seen by a large number of countries, EU and USA in particular, as a toxic pollutant even in the minutest quantities and in all it's forms.
 - b) Political bullying.
 - c) Cost effectiveness/maximising profit for the cartridge manufacturers. Steel as a raw material is cheaper than lead, so the future business development of steel shot cartridges looks very profitable.
 - d) Availability of lead as a raw material.
 - e) Every 100 years or so, gunmakers/retailers like to bring out something new to boost sales. Currently I see a few gun makers are promoting the sale and advantages of using ultra steel proofed guns, so maybe some dealerships will try to push these guns now, rather than the older or second hand guns. Which to my mind seems very limiting especially at a time when people have lost their jobs and simply don't want to buy a whole new gun, and with gun clubs closing due to the pandemic, the outcome is uncertain in the current economic conditions.

3. So is now a good time to sell my gun ? Should I modify my chokes or cut my barrel down to future proof my gun I hear some forum posts ask ? No, No and No is my firm reply. There is simply no reason on earth to ruin a good gun, or even a cheap gun for that matter by way of cutting back behind the chokes or even by removing the chokes with a reaming tool, as help has arrived in the form of two wads. The first wad is essentially a thick cardboard tube which when cut 4 or 8 times for the best pattern, can be used with steel birdshot, and is safe in the 4 steel barrels I tested. The second wad can be used in a full choke shotgun but gives the same pattern as if it were cylinder choked, thus making any gun (purely by carrying two types of ammo) a very versatile proposition, a bit like the multi choked gun is for the modern clay shooter.
4. Is steel really non toxic ?
Steel in moist conditions or exposed to water produces a red furry rust. This red oxide is toxic and can stunt the growth of water snails. *(This is backed up by FITASC in a report to the European Chemical Agency published July 2020. If you want a copy contact Rachel.)*
5. So what is wrong with Bismuth ?
Well Bismuth has three problems. Like steel it is very light so you need more and larger shot to make up your load, which means adapting wads and matching powders to get a good pattern/range. From a home loaders perspective the quality of Bismuth is ropey, with mis-shapen shot giving irregular patterns. It is also four times more expensive.

So, in conclusion, if using a steel barrelled gun post 1890, check your barrel dimensions and wall thickness, and the angles of your forcing cones and chokes, long smooth angles are best. Never use more than 24 grains of Red Dot, Unique or Vectan AS.

AVOID STEEL IN DAMASCUS GUNS.

New Sentencing Guidelines for Firearms Offences

These were published 9/12/20 and come into force on 1/1/2021. While the number of offences is low they can be extremely serious, the offences included in the guidelines are the various forms of possession of lawful, prohibited and imitation firearms. The carrying of said in public, and the intended use of, etc. etc. with maximum sentences of 5 years to Life. 90-95% of these offences are committed by men aged 19-50, of which 80 % of offenders are white, 15% are black, 5% Asian/Others. Sentencing appears to be disproportionately harsh for Black/Asian/Other Minor Ethnicities – which is being addressed in the guidelines.

Keep on keeping well,
Rachel Westlake.