

Wild Animal Welfare Committee response to HSE Lead Ammunition Report public consultation November 2023

The WAWC is a charity comprising animal welfare experts and specialists from across the UK. Their backgrounds include veterinary bodies, universities and animal welfare organisations. Members are appointed to WAWC on an individual basis.

The Committee's Objects are to advance animal welfare by:

- Providing an independent evidence base for evaluating, monitoring, assessing and improving decisions affecting the welfare of free-living wild animals in the UK;
- Increasing awareness of the importance and value of wild animals in general;
- Promoting the welfare of individual wild animals in particular;
- Highlighting harm to, and suffering of, wild animals caused by human activity, with the aim of reducing these negative impacts.

The WAWC:

- Disseminates objective information on a range of wild animal welfare topics;
- Commissions and publishes independent reports, statements and other contributions on contemporary wild animal welfare issues of public and political concern;
- Works to promote the awareness and improvement of wild animal welfare;
- Engages with organisations that can contribute to its evidence base.

We are aware that the widespread presence of lead in the natural environment has detrimental effects on wildlife species, often because of chronic accumulation. We are aware of the wide range of taxa affected, though in many areas information is lacking. We therefore welcome the proposal to regulate the use of lead gunshot and bullets to address the failure of voluntary methods to address this known and avoidable problem.

Specifically, from an animal welfare perspective, impacts on health and fitness seen in affected wildlife (and also likely in sub-clinical toxicity), will lead to consequential negative mental experiences in affected animals. The importance of these mental experiences is well recognised internationally, for example through the Five Domains Model for animal welfare assessment (e.g. Mellor et al, 2020). We believe that the welfare impact is significant but generally unrecognised and provide some basic examples here.

The physical impacts of chronic lead poisoning on humans and other animals are well known. Muscle pain is common as is fatigue and muscle wasting. (Headaches are common in humans and we could assume that something similar may occur in wildlife species.) For example, many of these signs are observed in birds of prey suffering from lead poisoning. These impacts will have a substantial effect on the ability of predatory animals, particularly owls and diurnal birds of prey to hunt and feed. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, birds with chronic lead poisoning are likely to suffer in several ways - pain, hunger and, as a consequence of being unable to perform their full behavioural repertoire, particularly appetitive behaviour; as a result, their mental state, and thus their welfare, will be poor as well.

Wildlife centres treating lead toxicity in swans (which is seen frequently), for example, recognise the welfare impact since these cases are hard to treat and get to a point where they can be released, thus becoming long-term casualties, unable to resume a natural life in the wild and suffering a poor welfare consequence as a result.

Ref: Mellor, D.J. et al., 2020. The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human-Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare. *Animals* 10, 1870; doi:10.3390/ani10101870