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The Fox Hunting Ban in England

Introduction

The sport of foxhunting, which involves the tracking, the chase, and sometimes the killing of a fox by trained foxhounds or scent hounds, is a controversial topic, particularly in the UK. Bans were introduced for Scotland in 2002, and then for England and Wales in 2005 under the Hunting Act (2004)¹. Proponents see it as an important part of the rural culture and economy, useful for conservation and pest control, while opponents argue it is cruel and unnecessary².

This paper looks at the effects of the hunting ban in England, in terms of the numbers now participating in hunting, the rural economy and employment with reference to the horse industry, farmers, and tourism. Finally it considers the future of the ban in relation to the proposals to repeal the Hunting Act 2004.

¹ "Hunt ban forced through Commons". BBC News. 2004-11-19. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4020453.stm. [accessed 17/08/10]

²The League Against Cruel Sports does not accept that hunting is a necessary form of predator or population control. *What's Wrong With Hunting?* [accessed 17/08/10] <http://www.league.org.uk/content.aspx?CategoryID=323&ArticleID=230>

The Current Situation

The controversy around fox hunting led to the passing of the Hunting Act 2004 in November 2004, after a free vote in the House of Commons, which made hunting with dogs unlawful in England and Wales from February 18, 2005.³ An amendment which allowed licensed hunting under stricter conditions, advocated by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair⁴ and some members of the government's independent inquiry⁵ on fox hunting was voted down⁶. The passing of the Hunting Act was also notable in that it was implemented through the use of the Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949⁷ after the House of Lords refused to pass the legislation, despite the Commons passing it by a majority⁸ of 317 votes to 145 in the third reading in July 2003⁹. Scotland, under its own Parliament, banned fox hunting in 2002, over two years before the ban in England and Wales.¹⁰

Effects of the Ban

1. Numbers Participating

After the fox hunting ban, hunts say that they follow artificially laid trails, although the League Against Cruel Sports¹¹ has alleged cases of law breaking¹². However, supporters of fox hunting claim that:

- the number of foxes killed by dogs has increased since the ban (as hunts continue both illegally and using trail hunting. Accidents happen when hounds trace a scent and can't be stopped from killing the fox);
- that hunts have reported an increase in membership;¹³ and

³ "Hunting Act 2004". HMSO. http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/ukpga_20040037_en_1.htm. [accessed 17/08/10]

⁴BBC News, (2004-11-19), "Hunt ban forced through Commons". http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4020453.stm. [accessed 17/08/10]

⁵ In December 1999, the then Home Secretary, Rt. Hon. Jack Straw MP, announced the establishment of a Government inquiry into hunting with dogs, to be chaired by the retired senior civil servant Lord Burns. The Burns Inquiry (or Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales) was set up to examine the facts under debate in the UK about fox hunting and other forms of hunting with dogs.

⁶ Hencke, D. (2000-01-04). "Row over hunting inquiry 'bias'". London: Guardian. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2000/jan/24/hunting.ruralaffairs>. [accessed 17/08/10].

⁷ An Act to make provision with respect to the powers of the House of Lords in relation to those of the House of Commons, and to limit the duration of Parliament. For more information see the *Parliamentary Standard Note on the Parliament Acts* (last updated March 2007) <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/briefings/snpc-00675.pdf> [accessed 17/08/10]

⁸ "Hunt ban forced through Commons". BBC News. 2004-11-19. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4020453.stm. [accessed 17/08/10]

⁹ BBC News (2005). Timeline: Hunting Row. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1846577.stm>

¹⁰ "Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act". HMSO. 2002. http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2002/asp_20020006_en_1. [accessed 17/08/10]

¹¹This is an animal welfare organisation that campaigns against all blood sports including fox hunting, bull fighting, hare coursing etc. It also campaigns against the manufacture, sale and use of snares, and for an end to commercial game shooting and trophy hunting <http://www.league.org.uk/>.

¹² League Against Cruel Sports (28-05-2010). CA man admits hunters are breaking the law. http://www.league.org.uk/blogs_entry.aspx?id=29 [accessed 17/08/10]

¹³ "More foxes dead' since hunt ban". BBC News. (2006-02-17). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4724028.stm>. [accessed 17/08/10]

- that around 320,000 people (their highest recorded number) turned up to fox hunts on Boxing Day 2006.¹⁴

There does not appear to have been a sharp decrease in the number of hunts in England since the ban. The Burns Report¹⁵ from 2000 noted that at the time of its inquiry there were approximately 200 registered packs of hounds in England and Wales¹⁶, and as of November 2008, the Master of Foxhounds Association lists 184 active hunts¹⁷. An article written by Melissa Kite, and published by the Telegraph in February 2007 states that, 2 years after the ban coming into force, participation in the sport had never been higher. According to the article, for the first time in centuries, two new packs have formed. One of these new additions is known as the Private Pack, set up by a financier named Roddy Fleming in Gloucestershire, and operates on an invitation-only basis. According to Melissa Kite, *“Young people are taking it up, enticed by the element of rebellion and the mystique of what actually happens as hunts attempt to keep within the law.”*¹⁸

An important fact highlighted by the articles is that no hunt has gone out of business, instead 34% report an increase in subscribers; while 10% say their numbers have decreased. Surprisingly the article reports that 115 new masters registered with the Mater of Foxhounds Association during the 2006-2007 season, and packs in England and Wales carried out more that 32,000 days of hunting between enforcement of the Act, in 2005, and 2007.

The Council of Hunting Associations informed that since the ban, all the recognised hunts have maintained their infrastructure and either go trail hunting or hunt under the exemptions within the Act¹⁹. This is likely to continue until the Hunting Act is repealed or replaced. Some hunts have a larger number of participants and others a lesser number, but the support for hunts parading at shows and game fairs has never been higher.

2. The Rural Economy and Employment

The Structure of a Hunt and Associated Employment.

It is important to get an understanding of the employment network involved around hunting. There are three stages to consider:

1. Direct Employment- this involves those who organise and participate in hunting (hunts and follower) e.g.: professional hunt staff, fence builders, stable staff such as grooms etc. The following diagram shows those who are directly involved with hunting. The example used is the Mudvale Hunt²⁰. Joint Masters are not paid. Hunt Staff (Huntsmen, Whippers-in and Kennelmen) tend to be professionals paid by the hunt. Many of the grooms are paid, particularly those working directly for mounted followers, where wages vary greatly depending on the employer.

¹⁴ "Hunts hail Boxing Day turn-out". BBC News. (2006-12-26). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6209365.stm>. [accessed 17/08/10]

¹⁵ The Burns Report was the result of the Government's Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales (see footnote 5)

¹⁶ Inquiry into Hunting With Dogs, *Final Report* (2000) (The Burns Report)

<http://www.huntinginquiry.gov.uk/mainsections/report.pdf> (p.7) [accessed 17/08/10]

¹⁷ Master of Foxhounds Association, Directory. <http://www.mfha.org.uk/directory/> [accessed 17/08/10]

¹⁸ Melissa Kite (2007) *I can't believe it's not hunting* . Press Release: Telegraph

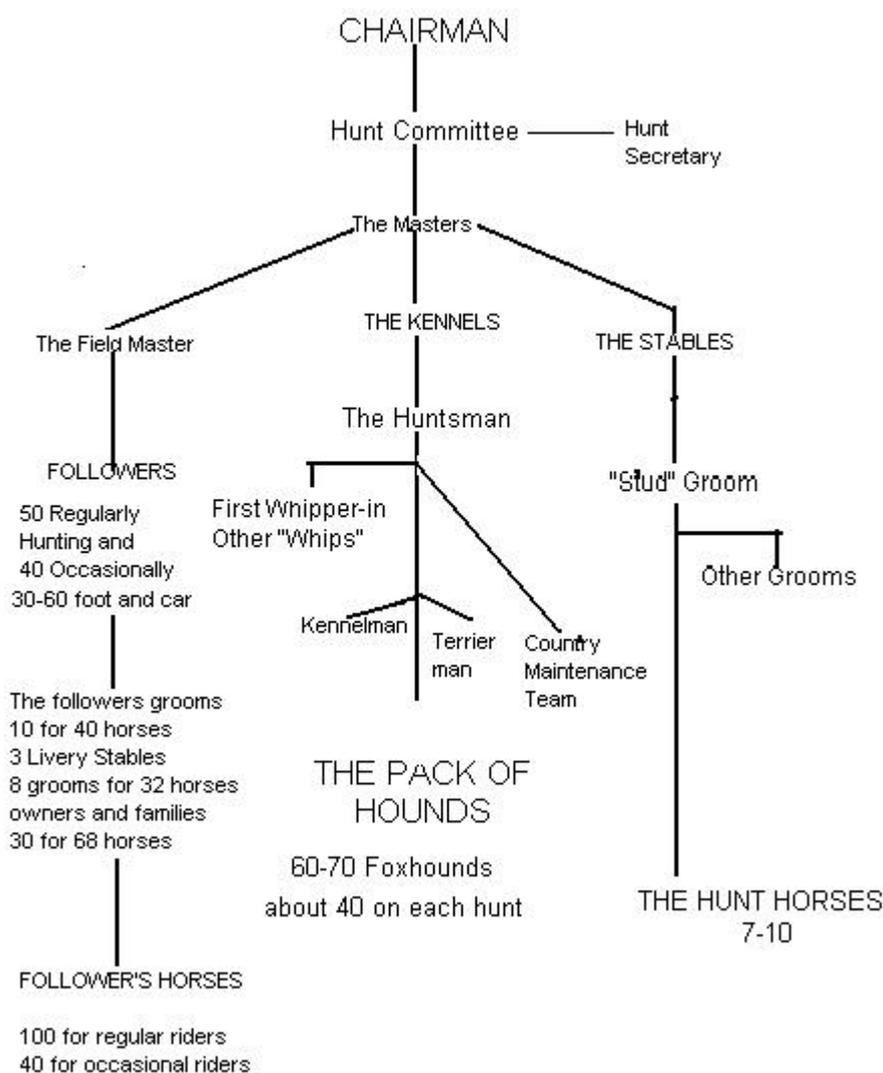
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1543006/I-cant-believe-its-not-hunting...html> [accessed 17/08/10]

¹⁹ These include; hounds being used to follow a scent to flush out a fox, the fox can then be killed by a bird of prey or shot, if only two dogs are involved. See the BBC article *'More Foxes dead' since hunt ban*

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4724028.stm>

²⁰ Source: Foxman, *Organisation of a medium sized hunt* <http://www.foxmanonline.org.uk/org.htm> [accessed 23/08/10]

THE MUDVALE HUNT



- **The Hunt Committee** usually owns the hounds, horses, coverts and other assets of the Hunt. They are, therefore, responsible for its finances including all debts.
- **Each Joint Master** is responsible for an aspect (e.g. the Hunt's horses) and an area of country, where he/she liaises with the farmers.
- **The Field Master** of the day (often the Joint Master of the area where the hunt will take place or a leading mounted follower) is responsible for the conduct of the day's hunting. At the end of the day, the field Master or the area's Joint Master will visit any farms which have been inconvenienced or where damage has been done and will arrange follow up; compensation etc.
- **The Huntsman**, assisted by the Whippers-in, is responsible for handling the hounds and for conducting the day's hunting as required by the Field Master.
- **The Whippers-in** are responsible for helping the Huntsman look after the hounds in the Kennels and when out hunting to keep the hounds together, particularly to keep count of them and to find any that have been separated from the pack.

- **The Kennelman** assists the Huntsman and Whippers-in to look after hounds in the Kennels. Normally this team also operates the Fallen Stock Service, which removes animal casualties from farms, at a well discounted price for farmers who allow the Hunt over their farm.
 - **The Terrierman** with a maximum of two assistants is responsible for using terriers to locate and destroy any fox which has gone to ground and which the farmer or land owner wants despatched.
 - **The Country Maintenance Team** repairs any damage done by the Hunt and assists farmers to keep the countryside in good condition.
2. Indirect Employment – these tend to be associated trades and services effected by the expenditure if those directly related to hunting, and include; farriers, feed merchants, vets, saddlers and clothing stockists, boot-makers, livery yards, bedding suppliers and transporters.
 3. Those reliant on the spending of the first two groups- such as tanneries that supply saddlers and boot makers etc, iron workers that supply farriers with horse shoes etc.

The Burns Report

The Burns Report concluded that the relationships between hunting and the rural economy are complex, with some economic activity merely serving it, and others dependent upon it. It estimated that at the time there were between 6,000 and 8,000 jobs dependent on hunting, with some 700 jobs being tied specifically to hunting. Up to a further 3,000 jobs were hunting-related while the rest included all manner of businesses and jobs which have any kind of economic relationship with hunts. *It is important to appreciate that estimates for these jobs may not be accurate due to a lack of formal records; therefore they could well be carried out by more than the number stated.*²¹

Burns valued employment as a direct result of hunting at around £15.6 million. This figure included the value of the services provided by hunts to farmers in taking dead stock from them to feed the hounds - a service that farmers would, if hunts were to be banned and the packs disbanded, have to pay for. The report stressed that the inquiry had not been able to provide a precise figure of how many jobs would be lost by imposing a ban. The team predicted that the first job losses would be of those employed by hunts, followed over the coming years by related-businesses affected by, for instance, the reduction in the use of horses.²²

Information supplied by the Council of Hunting Associations conveyed that there has been a minimal loss of jobs which is due more to a number of hunts giving up picking up dead stock from farms because of the expense and bureaucracy of the service. In the last 3 years hunts have recruited 25 young people into hunt service who have completed NVQ Level 2 training in Animal Care - all these people are currently progressing their careers in hunt employment.

²¹ Inquiry into Hunting With Dogs, *Final Report* (2000) (The Burns Report)

<http://www.huntinginquiry.gov.uk/mainsections/report.pdf>

²² *ibid*

The Horse Industry

Hunt followers spend considerable sums on horses, which is fed into the local economy. This can be for vets bills, farriers, clothing, stabling, feed, social events, transport and so on. According to the Burns report, the total sum could amount to over £70 million. Such figures also have to make estimates on the average size of salaries paid to those in such services, often these may be inaccurate due to the large range of salaries associated with the horse industry. For instance, groom's wages vary greatly depending on the employer²³.

Burns highlights the potential effect the ban could have on the horse industry as a whole. According to Burns, figures from the National Equestrian Survey (1999) suggest that the horse economy in the UK, which includes all forms of equestrian activities (e.g. dressage, show jumping, eventing, racing, leisure hacking, riding lessons etc), was large with an estimated 2.4 million participants in horse riding in general and 900,000 horses. The latest facts and figures on the number of horses and riders in the UK come from the 2006 British Equestrian Trade Association (BETA) National Equestrian Survey. This indicates that the total number of horses in the UK, for 2006, was 1.35 million, and the number of horses riders was 4.3 million²⁴. This shows a marked increase in the number of horses and riders compared to Burns' figures from 1999, suggesting that the horse economy as whole was able to survive despite the ban on hunting. There may have been a number of reasons for this, for example:

The Burns Report stated at the time:

"It is impossible to predict with any certainty what would happen in practice. What we can say with some confidence is that, even on a worst case scenario, not all the jobs presently dependent on hunting would be lost. In particular, we believe that only a small proportion of horse owners would immediately seek to get rid of their horses if a ban was introduced. It is much more likely that many would take up other equestrian activities, reduce the use of their horses or not buy new horses when the time came to replace them."²⁵

This suggested that those involved in the horse industry, instead of stopping equestrian activities completely, may direct their focus towards other forms of equestrianism such as show jumping, eventing (dressage, show jumping and cross- country combined) and dressage etc. This in turn may have a positive impact on those niche markets as people invest in horses suitable for those activities. The evidence from BETA on the numbers of horses and riders in the UK, suggest that the horse industry did not drop into decline since the ban, that other factors clearly kept it in the increase. The theories put forward by the Burns Report, based on a change of focus from hunting to other forms of equestrian activities, can not be considered as the only explanation for the continued success of the horse industry as a whole, as there is no proof directly related to this at this stage.

²³ Ads for grooming jobs show salaries in the range of £7-10 p/hr or between €200 and £350 per week, which usually includes accommodation. For examples see [Careergrooms.com](http://www.careergrooms.com).

<http://www.careergrooms.com/?qclid=CNaAqfO12aMCFYr92AodbFdU7g> More temporary/part time work may be based on 'cash in hand'.

²⁴ Figures were taken from the Horse Trust website based on data from the BETA (2006) National Equine Survey <http://www.homeofrestforhorses.co.uk/News2007/Facts--Figures-of-the-UK-Equine-Industry/>

²⁵ Inquiry into Hunting With Dogs, *Final Report* (2000) (The Burns Report) <http://www.huntinginquiry.gov.uk/mainsections/report.pdf>

Burns also put forward the point that many hunts may practice alternatives to hunting with hounds that would still fall within the legislation. Suggestions have been made that some form of exercise could be continued under the guise of drag hunting²⁶ where an artificial scent is laid.

According to the Daily Telegraph article "*I can't believe it's not hunting*"²⁷ foxes and stags are still being killed, roughly in the same numbers, as hunts pursue trail hunting.²⁸ If the hounds come across a live fox along the way, the Hunstman is allowed to use two dogs to flush the fox towards the gun to be shot. Also according to the article, 42 hunts use birds of prey due to a loophole which allows a full pack of hounds to flush out a fox in order to kill it with a bird such as an eagle.

There is also a large international market associated with the sale of hunt horses produced in the UK. There are many yards located throughout England who specialise in the buying and selling of specially produced hunting horses within the UK, and further afield to international markets such as America, where hunting is very popular due to the expanse of land, creating a huge industry there. There is still clearly a demand for hunting horses as people are continuing to produce a large number of them for sale, which can be seen under the 'Hunter' section on the Horse and Hound website. For more information visit the Horse and Hound website:

<http://www.horseandhound.co.uk/marketplace/>

In the Burns Report, the British Horse Racing Board expressed its concern on the future of Point-to-Point²⁹ and National Hunt Racing³⁰ with regards to a decrease in their frequency and employment. Of more concern is the loss of breeding, training and trading of hunting, point-to-point and National Hunt horses.³¹ All three types of horses are linked to hunting; as horses produced for point-to-points and National Hunt Racing start their training with hunting. In fact, National Hunt Hunter Chases are races for horses that have hunted in the current season. The racing industry has an extremely large circle of influence around it, maybe more so than hunting. There is the usual stable staff and grooms, jockeys, trainers, owners of horses, vets, farriers etc. But racing yards are also well known for employing horse physios, taking horses to swimming pools, and hiring out gallops etc which is all part of the demanding training process. There are also the 'bookies' who attend the meets and take bets on the field, the stud yards that specialise in breeding hunt chasers and point-to-point horses³². These are only some of the main examples, but it emphasises the possible knock on effect with a decline in hunting.

²⁶ Drag hunts use artificial scent and Drag Lines (courses), which are set more to exercise the skills of the followers than to simulate the behaviour of foxes. <http://www.foxmanonline.org.uk/findex.htm#substitutes>

²⁷ Melissa Kite (2007) *I can't believe it's not hunting*. Press Release: Telegraph <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1543006/I-cant-believe-its-not-hunting...html> [accessed 17/08/10]

²⁸ Trail Hunting uses actual fox scent and the trails are laid to simulate the real behaviour of foxes when chased. <http://www.foxmanonline.org.uk/findex.htm#substitutes>

²⁹ Point-to-Point racing is amateur horseracing over fences for hunting horses, and take place over a marked out course over land, by permission of the land owner. Horses running in Point-to-Points must be registered thoroughbreds. The horses have to obtain a certificate (Hunter Certificate) from a Master of Foxhounds stating that they have hunted for at least four days in the season, in addition the Riders must obtain a certificate from the Hunt Secretary. For more information visit http://www.pointtopoint.co.uk/faq_intro_basics.html

³⁰ National Hunt racing is the official name given to horse racing in the UK, and takes place at national hunt racecourses. The same principle applies in that horses must have hunted and obtained a certificate from a Master of Foxhounds. Well known meets include Cheltenham, and the Grand National at Aintree. For more information visit the British Horseracing Authority <http://www.britisshorseracing.com/goracing/Guide/Jumpracing/Typesofrace.asp>

³¹ Inquiry into Hunting With Dogs, *Final Report* (2000) (The Burns Report) <http://www.huntinginquiry.gov.uk/mainsections/report.pdf>

³² For an example of some stud yards visit: http://www.directoryoftheturf.com/search_results.cfm/searchcategory/Stud%20Farms/searchcountry/UK

The concerns expressed above were made during the inquiry in 1999/2000. Whether it's the fact that hunts have been practicing other forms to hunting, such as drag hunting, point- to point racing and National Hunt are today still being held on a frequent basis. For example, Weatherbys³³ lists a total of 235 Point-to-point fixtures for the 2009/2010 season (some of which were abandoned or postponed due to weather)³⁴ According to the website there are currently 119 Point-to-Point courses that held meetings throughout the UK during the 2009/10 season with one new course opening up, Whitcliffe Grange, near Ripon in North Yorkshire,³⁵ which suggests that the point-to-point industry is coping well enough to make full use of a new course, and the potential for more point-to–point meets.

Other concerns were raised during the inquiry by the Farriers Registration Council, which estimated a potential loss of 32% of business due to the ban. As mentioned before, more recent figures from BETA³⁶ suggest that the number of horses have increased compared to the number stated in the Burns report. Therefore implying that with a healthy horse population, there is more than likely a smaller impact on the business of farriers than originally expected.

Effect on Farmers

According to the Burns report, the effect on farmers due to the ban would include:

- The loss of a free pest control service;
- The loss of the hunt's staff and volunteers mending broken gates and fences for free;
- The potential loss of more lambs, poultry, piglets and game birds due to predation, and more damage to crops; and
- Farmers using the "fallen stock" service (where hunts remove unsalable dead/injured/sick farm animals) would face additional costs due to having to use a licensed knackers' service.

In relation to the above, Defra made a statement in 2004. According to them the fallen stock service would not be jeopardised by the ban, and would be able to continue to operate provided there was investment in new equipment. The reason for this being that the EU's Animal By-products Regulation³⁷ bans the routine on-farm burial and burning of animal carcasses. Therefore requiring farmers to have carcasses removed and disposed of properly, possibly encouraging them to use the hunt's 'fallen stock' service. The continuation of the service would be affected by the decision of the hunt on whether to continue it, and the choice made by the farmer with regards to using the service or not. According to Defra, there is potential for business opportunities especially with the introduction of the National Fallen Stock Company (NFS Co) and Scheme.³⁸ This was set up at the end of 2004 and operates as a not for profit farmer led organisation. When members have fallen stock they contact a registered collector of their choice, which according to NFS Co, includes Hunt Kennels.

³³ Weatherbys provides British Horseracing with its central administration <http://www.weatherbys.co.uk/>

³⁴ Weatherbys Point-to-point website http://www.pointtopoint.co.uk/fixture_list_2010.html

³⁵ Weatherbys point-to point, FAQs http://www.pointtopoint.co.uk/faq_meetings_courses.html [accessed 19/08/10]

³⁶ Figures were taken from the Horse Trust website based on data from the BETA (2006) National Equine Survey <http://www.homeofrestforhorses.co.uk/News2007/Facts--Figures-of-the-UK-Equine-Industry/>

³⁷ European Commission, *New Animal By-product Regulation: Guidance* http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/bse/bse48_en.pdf

³⁸ NFS Co website: <http://nfsco.co.uk/>

The collectors charge a fee based on:

- a headage basis for cattle, sheep, pigs and horses and;
- a weight or volume basis of a standard container for all species.

Effect on Tourism

Defra have even suggested that there are also some relevant rural industries – such as the horse industry and tourism – which are buoyant and they could help offset the end of hunting as a recreation by providing alternative business opportunities and employment prospects³⁹

Within the horse industry there has been a niche market for horse riding holidays providing hunting trips. In a document entitled '*Eldon Lectures 2008: Hunting in the House of Commons*', created by Baroness Hale of Richmond PC DBE⁴⁰, a detailed account is given of the final debate which took place in November 2004, between the House of Lords and the House of Commons, regarding the introduction of the Hunting Bill and the subsequent hunting ban. Baroness Hale of Richmond notes that providers of hunting and livery services, and of hunting holidays to foreigners, raised concerns that a hunting ban would create a restriction on their freedom to provide services for nationals of other EU states.

Providers of hunting holidays have clearly had to adapt due to the ban by offering alternative forms to hunting such as trail hunting and drag hunting. As the hunts have changed their approach to fit in with legislation, holiday providers have transformed their packages to fit in with the changes. Some websites promoting horse riding holidays, still recommend the 'traditional English hunting experience'. One website in particular explains that while the traditional hunting of foxes was banned in 2004, many hunts continue in a form of drag hunting or bloodhound hunting, where a real fox is replaced by a scent, so that the traditional hunt can continue. The main experience associated with this is the thrill of riding across the English country, rather than the thrill of a kill. Some hunting enthusiasts would argue that this takes away from the point of hunting, and that it does not replace the 'traditional' form of hunting that used to be practised in England.

Whatever the thoughts are, holiday providers still offer hunting holidays in the form of trail hunts and drag hunts, for example, Kimmerston Riding Centre in Northumberland, offers Trail Hunting Holidays with local hunts such as:

- College Valley and North Northumberland Hunt;
- Percy Hunt;
- West Percy Hunt;
- Border Hunt;
- Buccleuch Hunt; and
- Berwickshire Hunt.

³⁹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/countryside/hunting/ganda2.htm>

⁴⁰ Baroness Hale Of Richmond PC DBE, (2008) *Eldon Lectures 2008: Hunting in the House of Commons*. http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/lawdocs/hunting_lords.doc [accessed 24/08/10]

Their prices include:

- The charge of horse hire for a days hunting- £150/£160 per horse; and
- A cap fee (this is paid per person to the hunt) – usually between £50 and £60.⁴¹

According to an article from the BBC, one of the side affects of the ban has involved a change in hunting location. This involves a link-up between two English hunts, the Puckeridge and the East Sussex hunts, with the historic Pau-Hunt in France (who predominantly practice drag hunting). The partnership is seen as an all win situation with the English hunts bringing their tradition and fox hunting skills to Pau, where according to an article by Charles Bremner in the Sunday Times, suffers a problem with foxes due to their lack of hunting⁴². In return, the English hunts get to practice their usual form of fox hunting without having to substitute it for drag or trail hunting, as hunting with dogs is legal in France. Initially a pack of hounds is sent out, then members fly back and forwards to France from England, with the aim to bringing their horses out for permanent stabling. Two hunts are run under the same club, one for the French who want to continue drag hunting, and a separate pack to go out after live foxes.⁴³

In the past, 'My French Property', which advertises properties from agents in the southwest of France, has used the situation with the Pau Hunt and the English Hunts, as one of the features of the area:

*"Fox hunting has survived here since 1842 and due to the bans on hunting in the UK there is renewed interest in developing the activity with the likelihood that hounds will soon be relocated from the UK."*⁴⁴

The future of the Bill

David Cameron confirmed, in May 2010, plans to grant Conservative MPs a free vote on whether to bring back fox hunting in the UK. In the coalition government's 'Coalition: our programme for government', page 18 states: *"We will bring forward a motion on a free vote enabling the House of Commons to express its view on the repeal of the Hunting Act."*⁴⁵

On the 14th of August 2010, the Horse and Hound announced that the coalition government confirmed its intention to offer parliament the chance to review and repeal the 2004 Hunting Act. According to the article, the statement follows the closure of an online petition in 2007 on the Number 10 website⁴⁶, which called for repeal of the Act. Since the closure of the petition, the government responded;⁴⁷

⁴¹ Kimmerston Riding Centre, *Trail Hunting* http://www.kimmerston.com/fox_hunting.htm [accessed 20/08/10]

⁴² Charles Bremner, (2005) *Duke of Wellington's pastures lure hunters given the boot by Britain*, Sunday Times <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article513456.ece> [accessed 20/08/10]

⁴³ Hugh Schofield, *Ban Boost for Historic French Hunt* (2005) BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4249861.stm> [accessed 20/08/10]

⁴⁴ My French Property, Pau and Bearn (online) <http://www.myfrenchproperty.com/towns/pau.php?dept=64> [accessed 20/08/09]

⁴⁵ HM Government (2010) *The Coalition: our programme for government*. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf

⁴⁶ <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/huntingactrepeal/>

⁴⁷ Abigail Butcher, Horse and Hound (14/08/10) *Coalition government will review the Hunting Act*. <http://www.horseandhound.co.uk/news/397/301001.html> [accessed 23/08/10]

“The Act has not been a demonstrable success. It is an unnecessary drain on police resources and there have been a few prosecutions. We will put forward a motion before the House of Commons on whether the Act should be repealed and, if the motion is carried, bring forward legislation in due course.”

The idea of repeal has brought rise to a large debate across the country. On one side people are in support of repeal, for example:

- Some feel that as a form of legislation the Hunting Act 2004 has not been successful, due to the many loopholes that hunts can escape through. Many comments have been made on the lack of prosecutions. According to the article ‘*I Can’t Believe it’s not hunting*’, author Melissa Kite states that as of 2007, only one man had been convicted of breaking the law under private prosecution brought by the League Against Cruel Sports, and was fined £500 and ordered to pay £250 costs.⁴⁸
- The Tories have also supported the repeal by stating that the Bill had been an “abject failure.”⁴⁹
- The Countryside Alliance produced a *Case for Repeal*, which according to them gives a clear, concise and powerful argument for the repeal of the Hunting Act, and sets out why the Act is flawed and why it believes repeal is inevitable.⁵⁰ The Countryside Alliance also set up an online petition for people to join in support of the repeal. For more information visit: <http://www.repeal.org.uk/>

In comparison to the above, there has also been opposition to repealing the Act and the ban, for example:

- An Ipsos Mori survey commissioned for the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) last summer found that 75% of the British public did not want foxhunting to be made legal again.⁵¹
- The Labour party has set up a "back the ban" campaign, hoping to capitalise on support in recent opinion polls for the 2004 Hunting Act.⁵²
- Only a small number of prosecutions under the Hunting Act have reached court since 2005, but the report published by animal welfare charity IFAW in Action said 100 people had been brought to justice for breaking the law.⁵³

⁴⁸ Melissa Kite (2007) *I can't believe its not hunting*. Press Release: Telegraph <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1543006/i-cant-believe-its-not-hunting....html> [accessed 17/08/10]

⁴⁹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8521030.stm

⁵⁰ The Countryside Alliance (2008) *Hunting-The Case for Repeal* <http://www.countryside-alliance.org.uk/hunting-campaigns/hunting-views/hunting-%11-the-case-for-repeal/> [accessed 23/08/10]

⁵¹ Ifaw in Action (2009) No Return to Cruelty http://www.flipbookserver.com/scripts/showbook.aspx?ID=10001868_518458 (p.16)

⁵² Labour, *Back the Ban* <http://www2.labour.org.uk/backtheban> [accessed 23/08/10]

⁵³ Ifaw in Action (2009) No Return to Cruelty http://www.flipbookserver.com/scripts/showbook.aspx?ID=10001868_518458 (p.16)

- A fundamental argument is that Hunting with dogs is cruel in terms of animal welfare, and that it should not be made legal for this reason. A campaign in support of this view and to uphold the ban is the Campaign for Decency, with their sole aim being the welfare of animals. They are supporters of humane forms of pest control, but do not believe in the right to inflict cruelty and prolonged suffering in the name of sport, for which they feel hunting does⁵⁴.

It appears that the debate surrounding hunting will never be laid to rest as every argument raised, either for it or against it, is always met with a swift counter argument response. While a great deal of time, money and effort has been invested over the years in research, no matter how much scientific evidence is collected, people's personal opinions on the subject seem to be the main driving force behind the whole debate. For example, in response to the point made above in relation to keeping the ban for animal welfare reasons, Countryside Alliance Chairman, Kate Hoey MP, has argued:

- *"The Westcountry has seen the only two trials of huntsmen under the Act since it came into force two and a half years ago. In both cases the defendants were found guilty, but for reasons which had no connection to improving animal welfare."*⁵⁵
- *"Anyone with a real interest in animal welfare, such as ex-League Against Cruel Sports Director Jim Barrington who now campaigns against the Hunting Act, is as disgusted as I am that anyone could claim that Hunting Act prosecutions are in any way related to improving welfare standards."*⁵⁶
- *"The animal rights movement is measuring the success of the Hunting Act on the number of convictions it can get, not the number of animals it might have saved."*⁵⁷

For this reason alone, it is important to appreciate that behind both sides of the debate are arguments motivated by emotions, personal opinions, traditions, and the use of influenced data and evidence, therefore making it difficult to access and form an unbiased view of the situation.

⁵⁴ Campaign for Decency <http://www.campaignfordecency.org.uk/>

⁵⁵ Countryside Alliance (2007) Kate Hoey MP: "The Hunting Act is destined for repeal" <http://www.countryside-alliance.org.uk/hunting-campaigns/hunting-views/kate-hoey-mp%3A-%22the-hunting-act-is-destined-for-repeal%22/>

⁵⁶ ibid

⁵⁷ ibid