

Hunting Wild Mammals with Dogs Consultation Synopsis

John Blair MLA

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide an analysis of responses to the consultation on my proposed Members' Bill to ban the hunting of wild mammals with dogs in Northern Ireland.

The proposed legislation would prohibit the use of dogs to hunt, attack, or kill wild mammals. It may also incorporate preventative measures to close off any potential loopholes that could allow the use of dogs for flushing in large groups or where trail hunting becomes more prevalent in Northern Ireland.

The legislation will reflect on the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 and the Hunting Act (England and Wales) 2004, whilst addressing issues identified in these pieces of legislation. The legislation will also take into account Lord Bonython's review, which examined Scotland's previous 2002 Act and the Burn's inquiry into hunting with dogs in England and Wales. By exploring and implementing measures put in place by other jurisdictions, I can ensure that my proposed Bill is as effective as possible and prevents the creation of any loopholes.

What is the Case for Reform?

Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom without a ban on hunting live mammals with dogs, which includes hunting foxes. There has been a strong lobby in Northern Ireland to ban hunting with dogs, and other cruel sports. Indeed, there have been some changes, for example hare coursing has been illegal in Northern Ireland since 2011.

The Northern Ireland Assembly, since its inception, has failed to deal with this issue. In 2021, I brought forward a similar Members' Bill, but unfortunately, it was narrowly defeated during the second phase of the legislative process, where bills are reviewed and debated before moving forward. I am determined to reintroduce a revised Bill in this mandate and have carefully considered the concerns raised during the debates on my previous Bill.

Since my previous bill, Scotland has passed its Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023, which is now arguably the most robust hunting law in the United Kingdom. My new Members' Bill's aspirations are comparable in ambition to Scotland's Hunting with Dogs Act, as the latter ends illegal hunts and closes loopholes in the previous 20-year-old legislation.

There has been consistent public support in Northern Ireland for a ban on hunting with dogs. Polling over the years has consistently shown this trend, with the most recent opinion poll in 2024 further confirming it. The poll was conducted by LucidTalk Limited and commissioned by the USPCA and the League Against Cruel Sports as part of the Together campaign. It ran in February 2024, receiving responses from 1,050 people. The poll found that: 87% of respondents said deer hunting should be banned; 76% would ban fox hunting; 82% would ban hare hunting; and 77% would ban rabbit hunting. Indeed, the findings from this polling are similar to my consultation findings.

The poll also highlighted a known issue within Northern Ireland: only 53% of respondents knew it was legal to use dogs to hunt live animals in Northern Ireland. Therefore, 47% of respondents were unaware that hunting is still legal.

I frequently hear reports from farmers regarding problems arising from hunts, including trespassing, damage to fences, harm to livestock, and biosecurity threats due to potential disease spread. Despite public calls to end this practice, including fox hunting, a minority continue to enjoy it, highlighted by events like the Boxing Day hunt. Northern Ireland's lack of hunting legislation allows for animal cruelty, particularly in terrier work, where dogs can suffer serious injury in the fight with prey.

The Minister of Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs informed me that he has no plans to introduce hunting legislation and supports a Members' Bill aimed at prohibiting hunting live mammals with dogs. This legislation is necessary to enforce a ban and enable prosecutions, serving as a future deterrent.

Consultation Summary

The public consultation was conducted according to Assembly guidelines between 21st October 2024 and 20th January 2025. The consultation was originally scheduled to finish on 13th January 2025, however, I decided to extend the consultation by a period of one week due to the Christmas holiday period.

The thirteen-week consultation received 12,011 responses.

The majority of respondents (62.92%) said all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs should be banned in Northern Ireland. 72.27% of those who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they supported the ban.

- 67.19% of respondents said 'terrier work', the activity to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover, was unacceptable.
- 63.52% of respondents said the law should make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity.
- 62.94% of respondents said people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves, should be liable to prosecution.

When asked what sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill:

- 37.86% said imprisonment, using the same Sentencing Schedule currently in place for the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011
- 2.06% said fixed penalty notices
- 3.06% said fines
- 26.04% said a mixture of the above

- 30.99% said none of the above

73.84% of respondents said ending the hunting of wild mammals with dogs was important to them, and 61.07% of respondents said they ‘fully’ supported the intentions of the proposed Bill.

Looking only at responses from those who said they lived in Northern Ireland, a staggering 80.45% said ending hunting wild mammals with dogs was important to them, and 70.35% said they ‘fully supported the intentions of the proposed Bill.’

You can find a complete breakdown of the consultation responses in Annex One, which includes all responses, and in Annex Two, which focuses specifically on Northern Ireland responses.

Input from Key Stakeholders Gathered Separately

Engagement outside of the e-consultation platform:

1. Dogs Trust – I received an email response from Dogs Trust within the timeframe of the consultation. They asked for their response to be considered but not published.
2. The Workers Party – I received an email response from the Workers Party within the timeframe of the consultation. The Workers Party expressed its strong support for my proposed Bill and indicated no concerns.
3. A Northern Ireland hunting club sought information on whether drag hunting would be banned through the proposed Bill. He was informed that whilst this cannot be assured at this stage of the process, it is not the current intention of the proposed Bill to ban drag hunting.
4. Causeway Coast Dog Rescue – sought clarity on funding predictions for the proposed Bill and suggested that funding should be made available for rescue charities if they are confronted with a large number of hunting dogs being surrendered to them for rehoming.
5. A member of the public telephoned my Constituency Office seeking information on the proposed Bill in relation to game shooting. He was informed that game-shooting would not be considered within the parameters of the proposed Bill.
6. A member of the public called my Constituency Office to voice his support for the proposed Bill, citing his frequent observations of the damage caused by hunts. These include livestock disturbances due to hounds, land damage, open farm fences, and blocked public roadways.
7. In February 2025, I, supported by the USPCA and the League Against Cruel Sports, hosted a second round-table discussion with MLAs in Parliament Buildings. This was another opportunity to answer their questions about my proposed Bill. Questions were also put to the Scottish Official who worked on the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023.

Information on the proposed Bill was shared with, and meetings were offered to the following organisations/individuals:

- The British Veterinary Association
- The North of Ireland Veterinary Association
- The Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland
- The British Association for Shooting and Conservation
- The Countryside Alliance
- The Ulster Farmers' Union
- The Northern Ireland Assembly Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, as well as all Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly
- Queens University Belfast Student Union President
- Ulster University Student Union President
- Stranmillis Student Union President
- Ulster Wildlife
- National Trust
- Field Sports NI

Meetings with key stakeholders are ongoing. So far, I have met with the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the Countryside Alliance, and the British Veterinary Association.

E-Consultation Support for the Proposal

Out of the 12,011 respondents, 7,557 supported the proposed Bill to outlaw hunting with dogs, including trail hunting.

3,515 (72.27%) respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they supported the ban, with as high as 80.45% saying ending hunting wild mammals with dogs was important to them.

Responses to the public consultation were received from animal welfare organisations and animal rights activists including, but not limited to:

- Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals – Supported the Bill
- Crosskennan Lane Sanctuary – Supported the Bill
- Irish Council Against Blood Sports – Supported the Bill
- League Against Cruel Sports – Supported the Bill
- Mid-Antrim Animal Sanctuary – Supported the Bill
- Northern Ireland Badger Group – Supported the Bill
- PETA (UK) – Supported the Bill
- USPCA – Supported the Bill
- Ban Hunting NI – Supported the Bill
- Protect the Wild – Supported the Bill
- Association of Hunt Saboteurs Ireland – Supported the Bill
- Freedom for Animals – Supported the Bill
- Justice for Animals – Supported the Bill

- Professor Marie Fox and Dr Sarah Singh (School of Law, University of Liverpool) – Supported the Bill
- The Concerned Residents Ardtanagh Group – Supported the Bill
- Wild Animal Welfare Committee – Supported the Bill
- Badger Trust – Supported the Bill
- Lost and Found Dogs Buncrana – Supported the Bill
- Equine Halfway House Pony Rescue & Refuge Equine Welfare Network – Supported the Bill
- Born Free Foundation – Supported the Bill
- Equine Unlimited – Supported the Bill

Examples from the reasons provided for supporting the Bill:

- “I think how we treat animals says a lot about the type of people we are. We should not find it acceptable to actively hunt down, allow dogs to rip apart, and then kill innocent wild animals all for the sake of fun and tradition. I think accepting this sets a precedent for how we could treat the most vulnerable in our society”
- “Inhumane way to be hunted torn to shreds its unacceptable also a few domestic pets have been killed by the dogs entering private owners grounds which is wrong on all levels. It’s disgusting and it’s also cruel to the dog many go into busy roads only to be knocked down and could cause a nasty accident to drivers drivers with children. Huntsmen don’t really care they are so bloodthirsty. It needs to end”
- “As a keen sportsperson and horse rider I struggle to see how hunting with dogs can be classed as a sport. It is cruel on so many levels and even drag hunts can result in dogs picking up a live animal scent and hunting it”
- “If wild animals "belong" to anyone, they "belong" to everyone and I don't want "my" wild animals chased, threatened, mauled, injured, killed or otherwise harassed by dogs and "hunters””
- “The packs of dogs also target farm animals, ruin crops, run over roads and rail lines; this when they are supposedly following a scented trail. If they are following a trail, there doesn't seem a need for a pack of dogs which are intimidating for the general public”
- “I feel strongly that there is no case nowadays where the hunting and killing of wild animals anywhere for any excuse should be legally permitted. Especially now where our wildlife is under huge threat of extinction we should do everything to protect it”
- “Not only from an ecology perspective but from an animal rights perspective. In order to progress as a society, we must stop seeing other animals as commodities, hobbies, or objects to be played. It is unfathomable to me that is practise is still in place in 2025”
- “Barbaric, outdated, inhumane and ineffective way of controlling wildlife - not to mention the huge detriment to residents and pets having to endure packs of hounds largely out of control”
- “I am a farmer and believe all animals shouldn't suffer, especially at the expense of crazy people. I believe that hunting is necessary but stress and suffering to animals should be minimal as possible and never a sport”

It is not surprising that several responses from the open questions indicated that the proposed Bill is unnecessary since hunting mammals with dogs is already prohibited in Northern Ireland. This underscores a clear misunderstanding among the public, as many believe that hunting is already illegal, likely due to the ban across the rest of the United Kingdom and perhaps because hunting is viewed as an outdated and barbaric practice that should obviously be illegal.

Opposition to the Proposal

Out of the 12,011 respondents, only 4,454 opposed the proposed Bill to outlaw hunting with dogs, including trail hunting.

Only 1,349 (27.73%) respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland opposed a ban.

Responses to the public consultation were received from hunting associations and gun clubs including, but not limited to:

- Ballyclough Gun Club – Opposed the Bill
- Emyvale Truagh and District Gun Club – Opposed the Bill
- Ballyjamesduff Gun Club – Opposed the Bill
- Countryside Alliance – Opposed the Bill
- Ballyconnell Gun Club – Opposed the Bill
- Kilcloon Gun Club – Opposed the Bill
- Megargy & District Game & Conservation Society – Opposed the Bill
- Tipperary Foxhounds – Opposed the Bill
- Irish Working Terrier Federation – Opposed the Bill
- Glenville Harrier Club – Opposed the Bill
- Cotswold Vale Farmers Hunt – Opposed the Bill
- Country Sports Ireland – Opposed the Bill
- East Antrim Hounds Supporters Club – Opposed the Bill
- Fieldsports Channel – Opposed the Bill
- Tuam Gun Club – Opposed the Bill
- Shannagh Working Terrier Club – Opposed the Bill
- Northern Ireland Game Trust – Opposed the Bill
- Naul Game Association – Opposed the Bill
- Fell and Moorland Terrier Association – Opposed the Bill
- Co. Monaghan Regional Game Council – Opposed the Bill
- Fethard Game Protection Association – Opposed the Bill

Examples from the reasons provided for supporting the Bill:

- “I use dogs to flush rabbits which cause damage to crops and where their excavations cause livestock to break legs and have to be destroyed...I eat the rabbits I catch as do many of my friends and neighbours. In my opinion hunting with dogs is an extremely efficient way of flushing and dispatching an animal that is causing nuisance in whatever form”
- “Where large mammals exist, there is always a need for some form of control to limit their numbers in maintaining a healthy population. Again, once you accept there is the need, then various methods need to be considered. Hunting with hounds play a major role in controlling numbers, particularly in more secluded areas”
- “It’s important not to end hunting with dogs for many reasons. The social aspect of these country pursuits are vital for mental health in what is a lonely environment living out in the country”
- “Hunting with dogs is a way of life, an income, livelihood, hobby, tradition, a valued asset to the rural community through fallen stock services to pest control”
- “It is sound wildlife management, good for community cohesion, good for health and part of our cultural heritage. It's the essence of life, man's oldest try at survival”
- “Much of the ambition of the Bill is to do with dislike of the type of people who go hunting and is inspired by an urban mindset which has no knowledge of the realities of rural life: the necessity of pest control, the maintenance of a balance of populations as far as is possible in a world distorted by humans”
- “People who hunt are the main custodian of looking after species, particularly vulnerable species. If these people traditions and way of life are stopped, no one is in reality looking after those species”
- “It's been my livelihood since my grandfather and father brought me out as a child and 30 years later still only thing that gets me out of the house and helps my mental health”
- “If terrier work is banned it will cause great suffering to many ground nesting birds and will cause the fox population to explode”
- “With the banning of hunting with dogs there will be loss of employment as well as tradition. As well as increased vermin which will be harder to control”

Shortly after the consultation began, an independent campaign, mentioning the Countryside Alliance, was launched. This campaign involved MLAs receiving emails from their constituents that questioned the integrity of my consultation, despite it adhering to Assembly guidelines. The Speaker of the Assembly was copied in on these emails. I responded to the emails I received through this campaign to address any inaccuracies or concerns.

One of the concerns raised through this campaign was that the questions were altered after the consultation went live. The consultation questionnaire’s general content was not changed after going live, and the questions remained the same. A minor administrative alteration was made to Question 9 to facilitate a reply option for those who did not agree with the implementation of any penalties. This change will likely help objectors to my Bill rather than supporters in completing the form. In addition, Questions 13 and 14 were made

non-mandatory simply to allow those who support the Bill and do not propose changes to complete the questionnaire.

The campaign email also suggested that the complexity of the issue casts uncertainty on whether it should be addressed through a Member's Bill, claiming that it might infringe on human rights and adversely affect the country pursuits community, farmers, wildlife management, and biodiversity.

When I notified the AERA Committee that the consultation was now live, I was asked about these claims. I corrected the misinformation and sent an email to all MLAs inviting them to speak with me if they wished to discuss the claims presented in the campaign email as well.

Proposals to Develop Ambitions and Goals

The consultation raises valid questions concerning 'trail hunting', 'drag hunting' and 'clean boot hunting' under the provisions of the proposed Bill. I recognise the challenges associated with 'trail hunting' in other regions, primarily its misuse as a "smokescreen" for illegal hunting activities.

For 'drag hunting' and 'clean boot hunting', I intend to implement a 'Recklessness Clause' in the proposed legislation, akin to one from my previous Bill. This clause would prohibit the use of 'drag hunting' or 'clean boot hunting' as a cover and impose a duty of care on hunts to safeguard wildlife and their environments. For example, if a hunt chases an animal during a 'drag hunt', it would constitute an offence under the Recklessness Clause for failing to control the hounds properly. Additionally, hunts must follow a designated route marked by an artificial scent, and the clause will ensure that the scent is not laid near livestock or across public roads or railway lines. Violating this provision would result in an offence. If hunts are authentically participating in 'drag hunting' or 'clean boot hunting', they should have no issue with this clause's inclusion.

Additionally, many consultation respondents and key stakeholders repeatedly addressed the need to regulate the fox population, particularly concerning farmers' rights to protect their livestock. Consequently, I recognise that this matter requires careful attention when finalising the Bill. The Hunting with Mammals (Scotland) Act 2023 emphasised the significance of enabling predator control, and I intend to include comparable protective provisions in my Bill.

Lastly, my proposed Bill has raised concerns about the potential prosecution of dog walkers if their dogs chase and kill wild mammals during walks. I plan to clarify in the wording of my Bill, again, based on the Hunting Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill 2023, that accountability lies with the individual. Essentially, the individual must be showing intent to hunt a wild mammal with their dog and this intent would have to be proven.

Proposed Alternatives to the Legislation

The consultation effectively assessed public opinion on my proposed Bill and several alternatives were put forward. For instance, suggestions included enforcing a strict code of conduct, establishing stringent rules for governing bodies to uphold standards, designating a specific hunting season, restricting the number of dogs allowed to participate, and creating a list of species allowed for hunting.

While these suggestions are valid, there are Memoranda of Understanding that hunting groups and organisations have signed, yet I have heard reports of these being overlooked. This underscores the need for a ban rather than mere regulation. The responses indicate a recognised lack of transparency regarding hunting activities, which are perceived as rural practices that are often overlooked.

Ultimately, the strong support during the public consultation process underscores the need for legislation to be introduced as outlined in my Members' Bill or a similar format proposed.

Weighting of Responses

Approximately 60% of the responses submitted during the consultation were from individuals residing outside of Northern Ireland. While the input from these respondents is valuable and contributes meaningfully to the overall findings, it is equally important to highlight the perspectives of those who specifically indicated their residence within Northern Ireland. This distinction allows for a deeper understanding of the views and concerns of the local population, ensuring that their voices are adequately represented and considered in the final outcomes of the consultation.

Consideration of Convention Rights and Other Competence Issues

I have considered the Convention Rights, Section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework concerning my proposed Bill, and I believe it will not have any implications.

Additionally, when I wrote to them in July 2024 to inform them about the proposed bill, both the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission raised no objections to the policy objective.

Indeed, the 2006 Supreme Court ruling addressed the matter of convention rights concerning hunting. A Court of Appeal ruling determined that the hunting ban in England

and Wales, as established by the Hunting Act 2004, was a "legitimate and proportionate" exercise of power, and that it neither violated the European Convention on Human Rights nor breached European Union trade and employment laws, contrary to the claims made by the Countryside Alliance.

Consideration of Financial Impact

I understand that, as with much new legislation, the successful implementation of my proposed Bill may necessitate increased resources from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Department of Justice and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. These resources are essential to ensure that offenders are held accountable under the terms of the legislation. In addition, fines imposed on individuals who do not comply with the new regulations could contribute to offsetting enforcement costs, providing a mechanism to fund ongoing efforts in monitoring and compliance.

The PSNI and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs were unable to quantify the financial effects of my previous Bill at the time. Therefore, it is difficult to provide any significant detail on this issue at this stage. I do, however, welcome further discussion on these issues as the Bill progresses.

I understand that pre-legislation research conducted in other jurisdictions has suggested that the introduction of a ban could potentially lead to job losses and some loss of expenditure in the country. It is a valid concern that must be addressed. However, it is important to highlight that no significant economic losses arising from the Hunting Act 2004 in England and Wales have been reported. Similarly, the more recent and robust Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 has not resulted in any substantial negative economic impact. This evidence should provide reassurance that the concerns about job losses may be overstated and that proactive alternatives can be developed within the economy.

Moreover, the Countryside Alliance critiqued my proposal in an online article that first discussed Northern Ireland's hospital waiting lists before stating: "Blair needs to ask himself the question of whether he continues to pursue a pet project that will eat up a huge amount of time and legislative resources that the Assembly is in very short supply of (not to mention the cost to the taxpayer and detriment to every citizen), or if he will get on and start helping address the real issues affecting our everyday lives, working towards implementing strategies that tackle structural challenges, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for everyone throughout Northern Ireland."

I am familiar with this argument against my proposed Bill. Of course, I recognise the various challenges facing Northern Ireland, including the hospital waiting lists. However, implying that someone on a waiting list cannot also care deeply about animal welfare is both dismissive and, frankly, insulting. In a similar sense, one can be concerned about environmental issues while also worrying about their child's educational opportunities. My proposed Bill is no different.

Concluding Remarks

The feedback from my consultation has helped me enhance the proposal for my Members' Bill. I am pleased to see ongoing enthusiasm for banning the hunting of wild mammals with dogs, much like what I witnessed during my previous attempt at passing this Bill. Similarly, I am not surprised by the recurring biased and misleading narratives that emerged, as I encountered similar responses during the previous consultation.

Additionally, since my last effort, the Hunting with Dogs Act was enacted in Scotland in 2023. This has been advantageous because, alongside the insights gained from the consultation, I can incorporate the lessons from Scotland's approach, which was more effective and filled gaps in their prior legislation, the Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002.

I want to thank everyone who participated in my consultation or contributed to this phase of the process. I would like to specifically recognise the dedication and effort of both the USPCA and the League Against Cruel Sports, whose support I highly value. I look forward to the upcoming stages in the process and am hopeful that we will finally see an end to hunting with dogs in Northern Ireland.

What Happens Next?

Updates on the progress of the Bill will be shared via my social media platforms and the Northern Ireland Assembly website.

A Note on Data

All data gathered during the consultation will be deleted once the current Northern Ireland Assembly mandate (2022-2027) is completed.

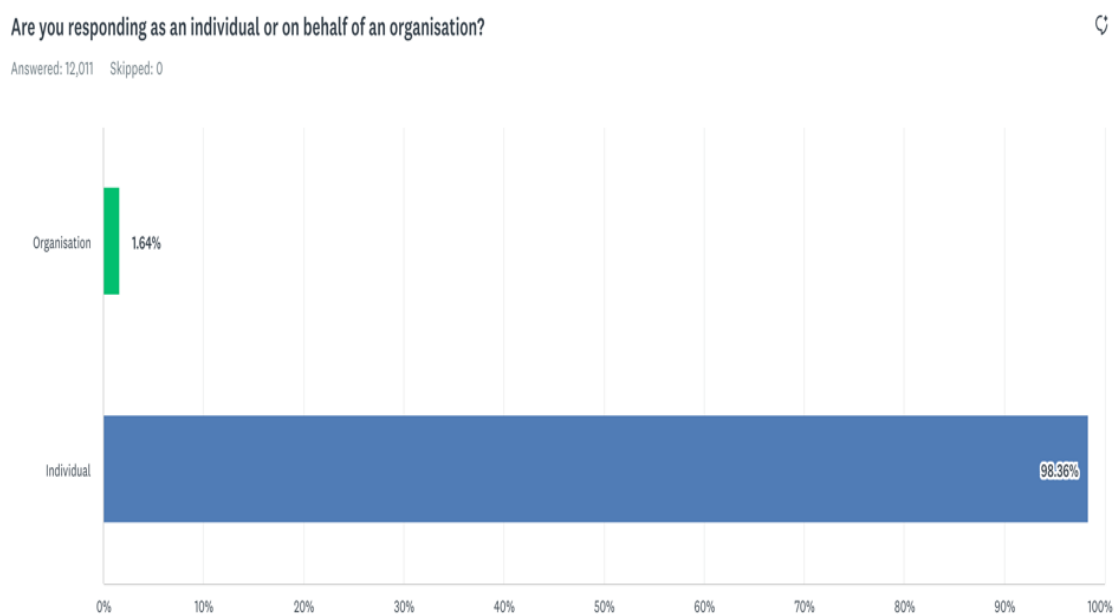
All information in this document is accurate as of the end of the consultation on 20th January 2025.

Annex One: Breakdown Of All E-Consultation Responses

From 21st October 2024, to 20th January 2025, the public consultation on the Members' Bill aimed at banning the hunting of wild mammals with dogs garnered a significant number of responses. The summary below details the feedback on each question posed during the consultation, which was carried out using the Survey Monkey platform. Following this (Annex Two), is a breakdown focusing solely on the responses from those who indicated in Question 3 that they lived in Northern Ireland.

Question 1: This question asked respondents whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.

Result: 98.36% of respondents said they were responding as an individual, with 1.64% responding on behalf of an organisation.



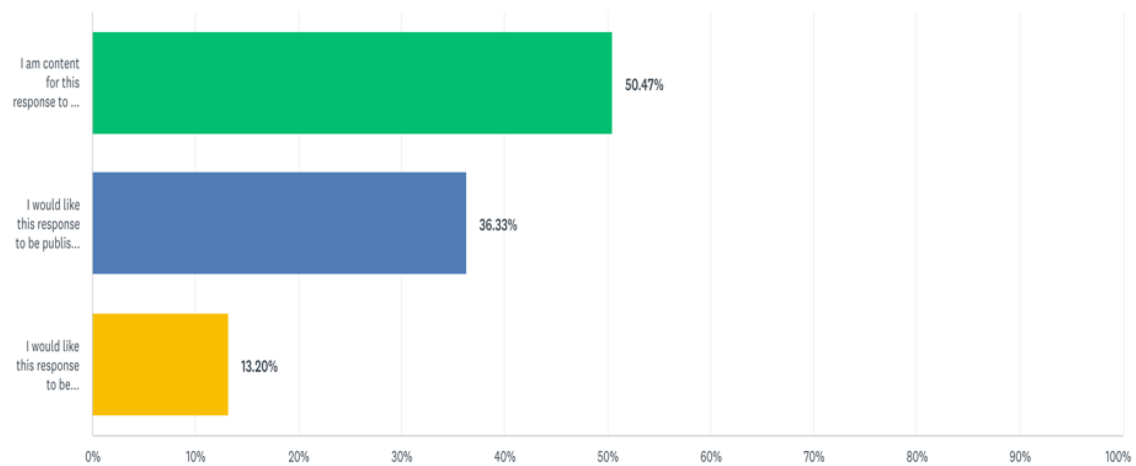
Question 2: This question asked respondents whether or not they wished their response to be published and attributed to themselves/their organisation, published anonymously, or considered but not published.

Result: 50.47% of respondents said they are content for their response to be published and attributed to them or their organisation; 36.33% of respondents said they would like their response to be published anonymously; and 13.20% of respondents said they would like their response to be considered but not published.

Please choose one of the following



Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



Question 3: This question asked respondents where they lived.

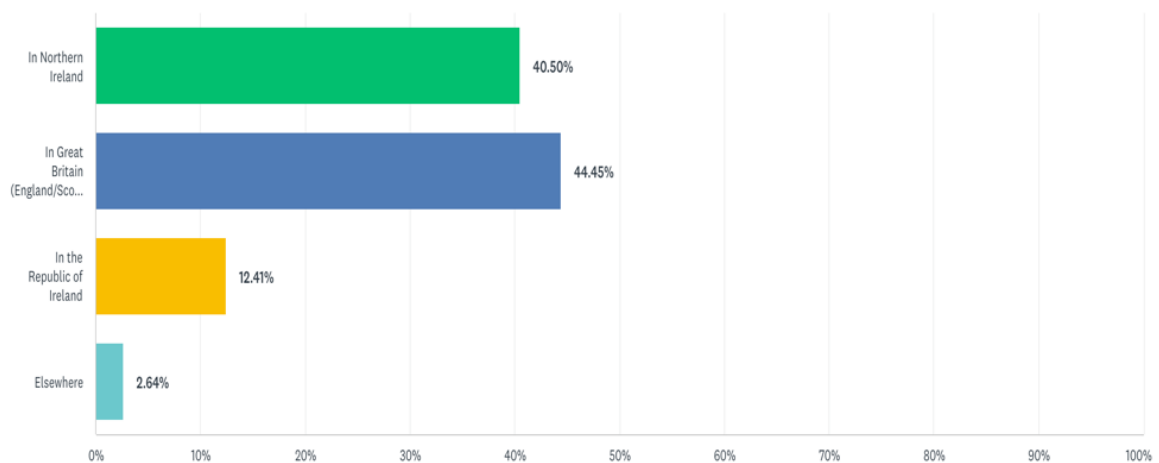
Result:

- 40.50% said they lived in **Northern Ireland**
- 44.45% said they lived in **Great Britain (England, Scotland or Wales)**
- 12.41% said they lived in the **Republic of Ireland**
- 2.64% said they lived **elsewhere**

Where do you live



Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0

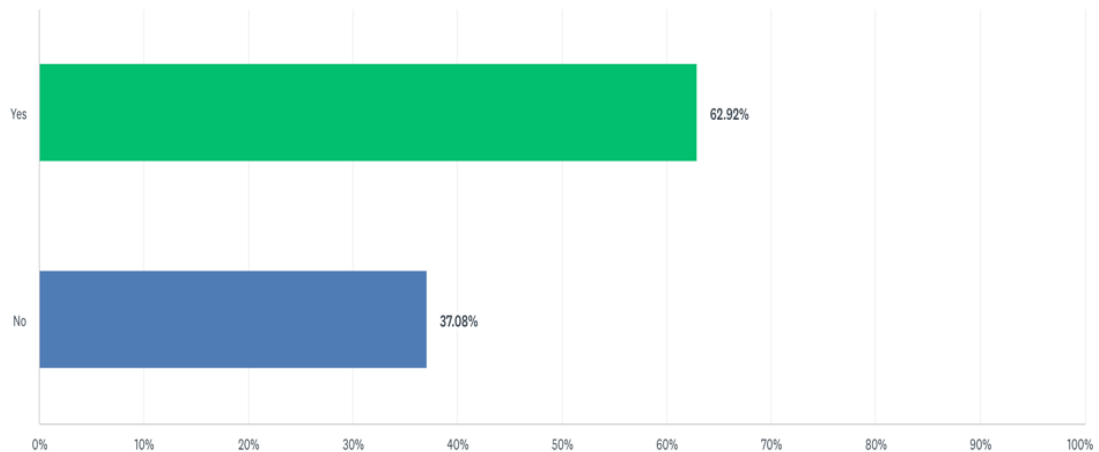


Question 4: Should all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs be banned in Northern Ireland?

Result: The majority of respondents (62.92%) said all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs should be banned in Northern Ireland. Whereas, 37.08% opposed a ban being implemented in Northern Ireland.

Should all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs be banned in Northern Ireland?

Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0

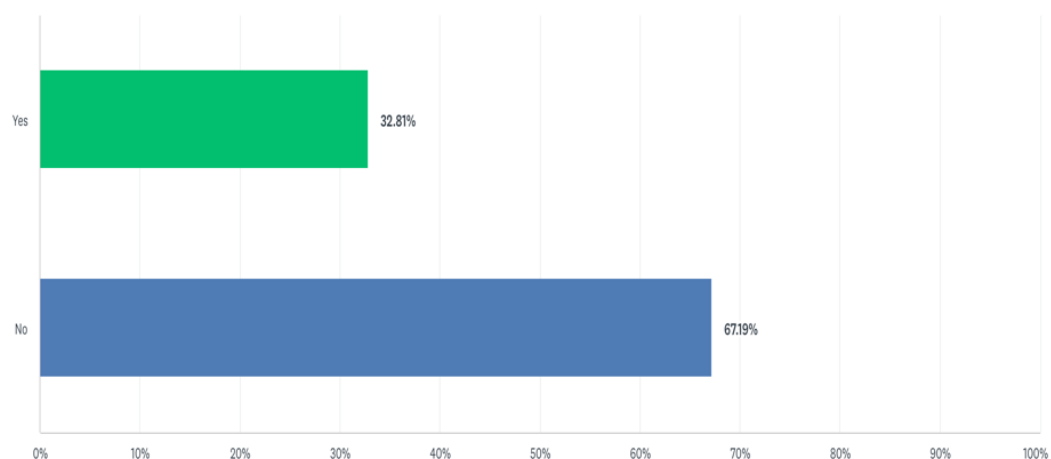


Question 5: Terrier work, and flushing, is a legal activity in Northern Ireland and the term describes dogs being put underground to attack and potentially kill a wild animal. Once a wild animal has gone to ground, is it acceptable to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover?

Result: 67.19% of respondents said 'terrier work', the activity to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover, was unacceptable. 32.81% of respondents thought the practice was acceptable.

Terrier work, and flushing, is a legal activity in Northern Ireland and the term describes dogs being put underground to attack and potentially kill ...

Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0

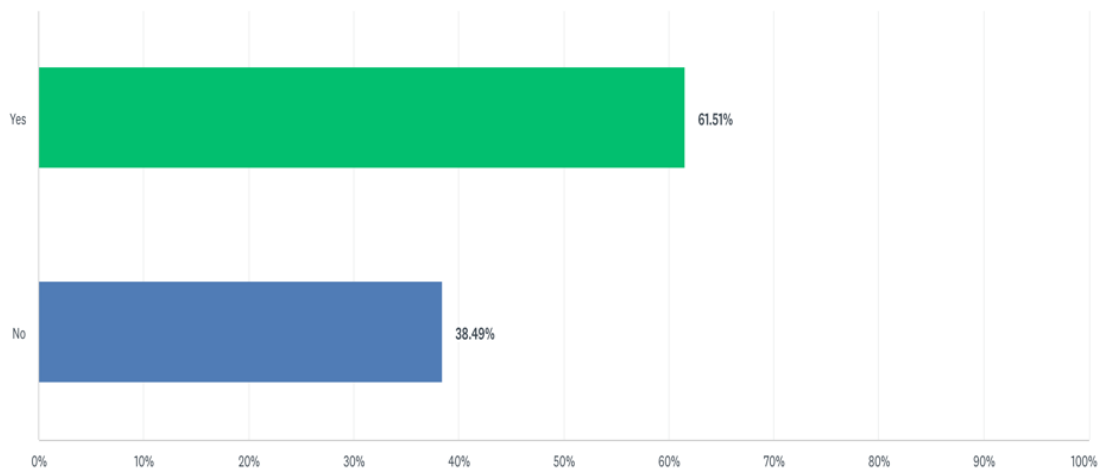


Question 6: Should trail hunting, the process in which one or more dogs are induced or permitted to follow the scent of a wild mammal (whether the trail of scent has been laid naturally or by human intervention) be banned in Northern Ireland?

Result: 61.51% of respondents said trail hunting, the process in which one or more dogs are induced or permitted to follow the scent of a wild mammal (whether the trail of scent has been laid naturally or by human intervention) be banned in Northern Ireland. 38.49% of respondents thought the practice was acceptable.

Should trail hunting, the process in which one or more dogs are induced or permitted to follow the scent of a wild mammal (whether the trail of sc... 

Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



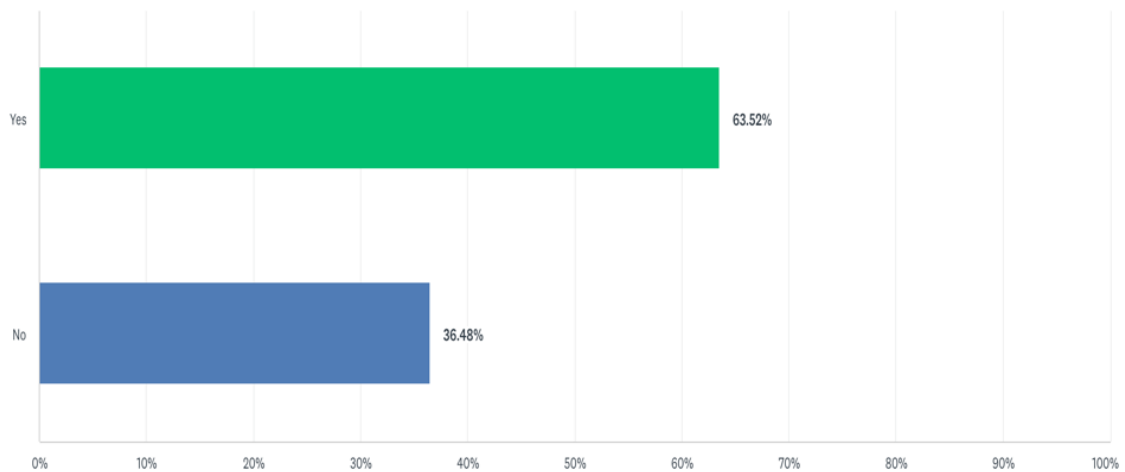
Question 7: Should the law make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity?

Result: 63.52% of respondents said the law should make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity. 36.48% of respondents opposed this suggestion.

Should the law make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted per...



Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



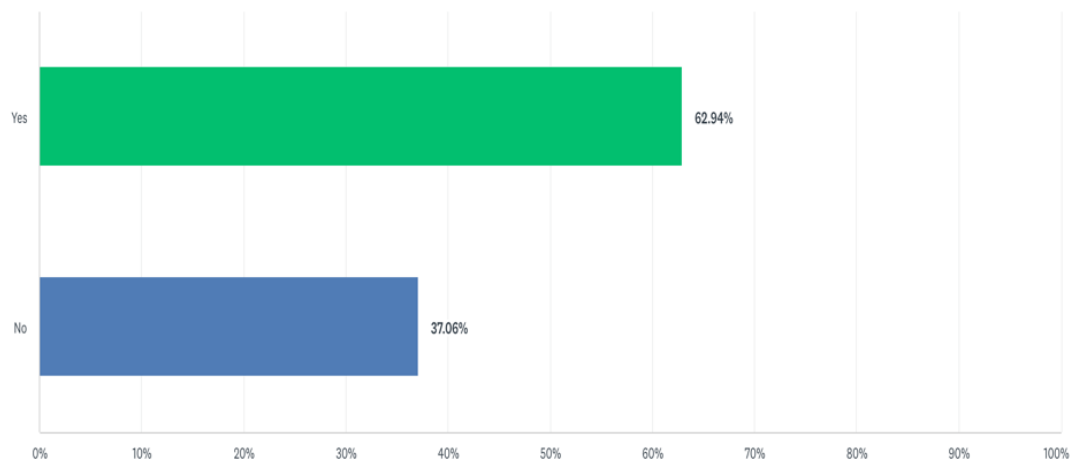
Question 8: Should people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves be liable to prosecution?

Result: 62.94% of respondents said people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves, should be liable to prosecution. 37.06% of respondents opposed this suggestion.

Should people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves be liable to prosecution?



Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



Question 9: What sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill?

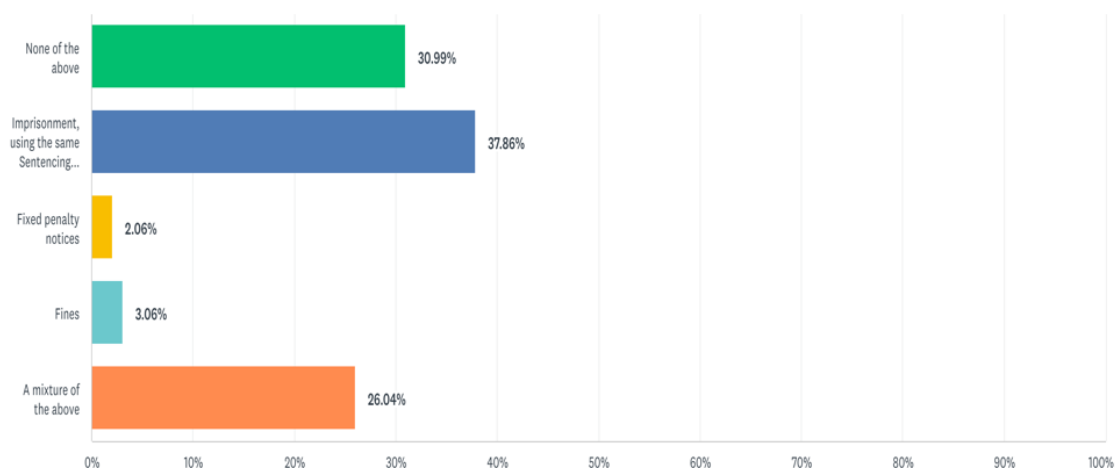
Result: When asked what sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill:

- 37.86% said **imprisonment**, using the same Sentencing Schedule currently in place for the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011
- 2.06% said **fixed penalty notices**
- 3.06% said **fines**
- 26.04% said **a mixture of the above**
- 30.99% said **none of the above**

What sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill?



Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



Question 10: What exemptions, if any, do you believe should be included or excluded?

Result: Sample of responses provided below:

- "Pest control should be an exemption"
- "If the person didn't know their land was being used for sport"
- "Conservation purposes and protection of red listed species"
- "Trail hunting should be included and kept to allow the continuation of British tradition"
- "If wild mammals are causing harm and destruction to property, then hunting said mammals should be allowed"
- "If a dog escapes from its owner and singularly attacks a wild animal"
- "All registered Hunts"
- "No exemptions which equal loopholes"
- "Using terrier type dogs to hunt and kill vermin (rats/mice)- terrier type dogs were bred for this type of activity, and are more effective and less damaging than poisons for this type of pest control"

- “For serious, necessary culling in which saves other animals lives eg. Infection control”

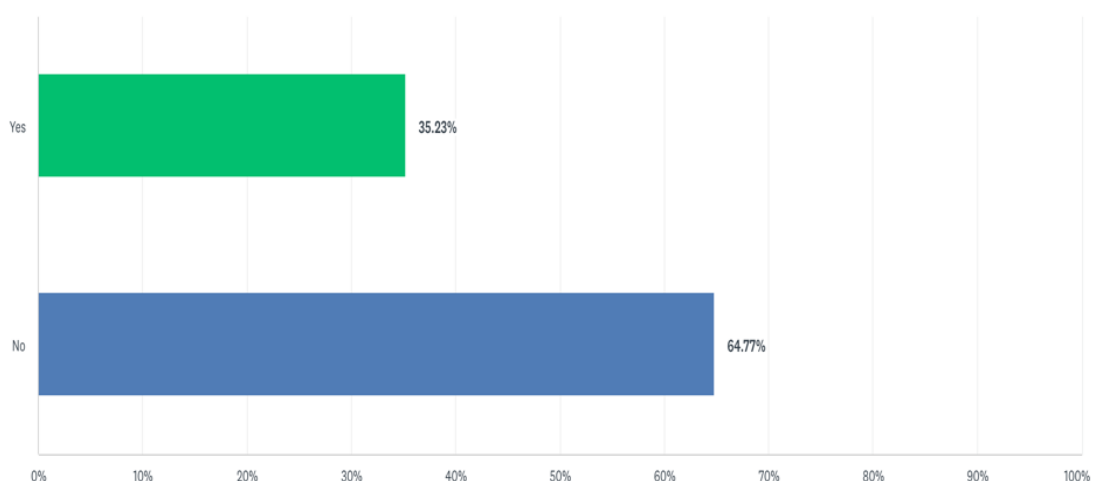
Question 11: Do you foresee any unintended consequences of the proposed law? If yes, what safeguards could be put in place to mitigate against these?

Result: 64.77% of respondents said they do not foresee any unintended consequences of the proposed law. 35.23% of respondents said they do foresee unintended consequences. A sample of responses is also provided below:

- “Wild life will flourish and hopefully people will lose their lust for a blood sport which is completely barbaric”
- “Increased crop damage”
- “Less dogs with hunting injuries. Less pet dogs being injured/caught up in the hunt. Wildlife and farm animals will be safe”
- “Owners whose pet dogs get an opportunity to chase cats from time to time (i.e. escaping their home to do so) should not be penalised if its purely accidental”
- “The nonsense that is trail hunting. People are still hunting. Wildlife policing needs to be better”
- “If the law is not sufficiently enforced illegal hunting will take place”
- “The decline in community, mental health and many job opportunities lost”
- “Evidence from Scotland shows that there are no unintended consequences”
- “Inability to effectively control pest species”
- “Rehoming of dogs previously used for blood sport. Rescue kennels and rehoming programme and stopping breeding those breeds used for blood sport”

Do you foresee any unintended consequences of the proposed law? If yes, what safeguards could be put in place to mitigate against these?

Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



Question 12: To what extent do you support the ambitions of the Bill?

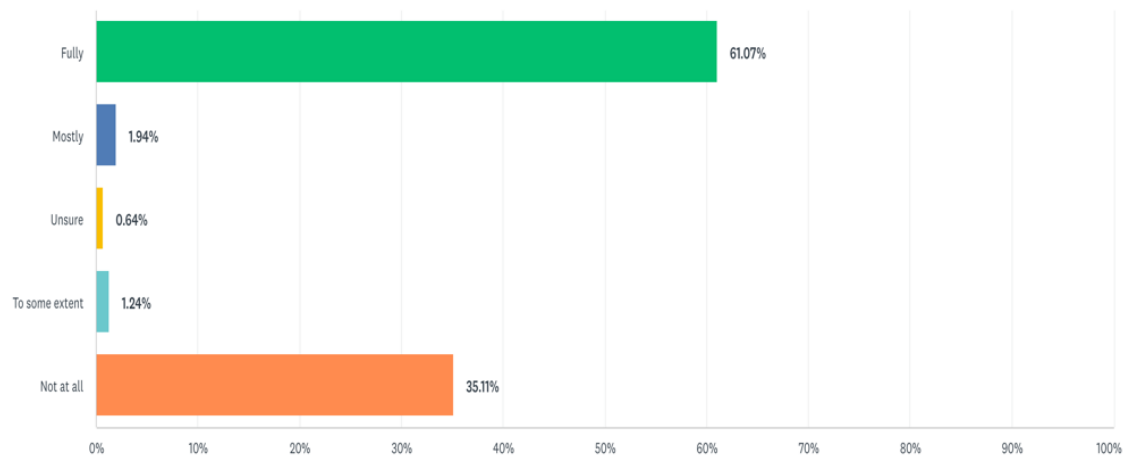
Result: When asked to what extent they support the ambition of the Bill:

- 61.07% said **fully**
- 1.94% said **mostly**
- 0.64% said **unsure**
- 1.24% said **to some extent**
- 35.11% said **not at all**

To what extent do you support the ambitions of the Bill?



Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



Question 13: If you do NOT agree with the Bill proposal, what additional measures would convince you to agree?

Result: Sample of responses provided below:

- “The removal of fox, badger, rabbit and hare is essential and flushing with dogs, using dogs below ground and using dogs to track scent is vital. This cannot be ignored”
- “Licensing of hound packs”
- “Permit trail/drag/bloodhounds”
- “Appropriate consideration for the impact on rural industries and communities”
- “Clear, honest instructions on what will be put into law and what will be and not be effected”
- “Sensible licensing”
- “Allow trail hunting if policed”
- “A focussed approach which ACTUALLY brings us into line with general GB legislation and does not go beyond”
- “Country sports people involved in drawing up the bill”

- “Exemptions for people passing exams demonstrating their knowledge of natural systems and the importance of the balance of nature and the role hunting in conservation”

Question 14: If you do NOT agree with the Bill proposal, what alternative proposal, if any, would you support in respect of hunting mammals with dogs?

Result: Sample of responses provided below:

- “A fair governing body”
- “A strict code of conduct adhered to”
- “More stringent, more complete, stronger rules”
- “A voluntary code of practice”
- “Limited government involvement required. Allow governing bodies to ensure standards are adhered to”
- “Engage with the stakeholders before introduction. Focus on evidence-based approaches addressing animal welfare, while letting legitimate hunting to continue”
- “Have a season for when it can be done and a quarry list of species”
- “Maximum number of dogs allowed to be used at one time”
- “Seasons and permitted licensing”
- “Proper regulation and control”

Question 15: Do you have any suggestions as to how the ambitions of the proposal could be improved?

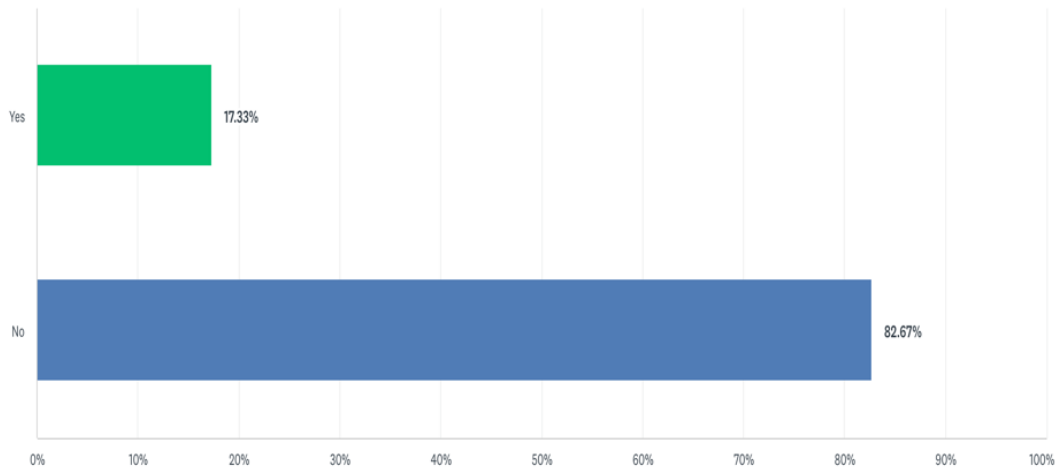
Result: 82.67% of respondents said they had no suggestions as to how the ambitions of the proposal could be improved. 17.33% answered ‘yes’ to this question. A sample of responses is also provided below:

- “More education in schools and to the public to learn to respect wild animals”
- “A plan to rehome hounds used hunts”
- “That the PSNI and courts enforce the law fully”
- “Ban hunting for profit. Subsistence hunting allowed across the board. Do not allow people to pay for hunting services”
- “An outright ban on breeding the dogs that are used for hunting. Any breeding of dogs for financial returns should be outlawed”
- “Only to ensure the law is fully upheld and that penalties are severe enough to act as a deterrent”
- “Strengthen welfare laws for all animals”
- “Give land owners/farmers power to prevent, stop and remove people hunting on their land”
- “Further genuine consultation with land owners and stakeholders”
- “Use a license”

Do you have any suggestions as to how the ambitions of the proposal could be improved?



Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



Question 16: Is ending hunting wild mammals with dogs important to you?

Result: An overwhelming majority (73.84%) of respondents said ending hunting wild mammals with dogs is important to them. 26.16% said it was not important to them. A sample of responses is also provided below:

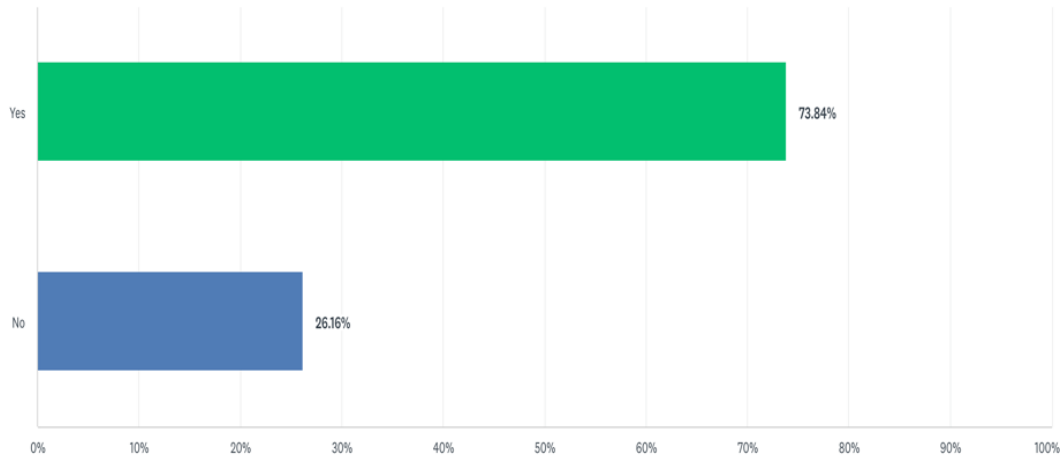
- "It is illegal already so is not an issue"
- "It is part of a very traditional way of life and shouldn't be interfered with"
- "It is a sport, and not for human survival anymore. As a sport it is barbaric and unnecessary for animals to suffer in this way (both wild, and dogs used to hunt)"
- "Hunting is important for rural communities , livestock farmers and wildlife management"
- "There is no place in society for humans enjoying the killing of other sentient beings. Its barbaric and not entertainment"
- "It trains dogs to become aggressive"
- "It is a part of the fabric, culture and history of Great Britain and is therefore of great importance to the nation"
- "It's being a tradition for years and brings country folk together get them out of the house socialise and meeting old friends and some people that's all they have"
- "This is probably the least important issue we are facing today especially when compared to inflation, poverty, grooming by gangs, knife and gun crime and illegal immigration"

- “Because it's cruel and unnecessary when protective measures can be put in place to safeguard farm animals”

Is ending hunting wild mammals with dogs important to you?



Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



Question 17: Do you think the cost of implementation and policing the proposed Act is acceptable?

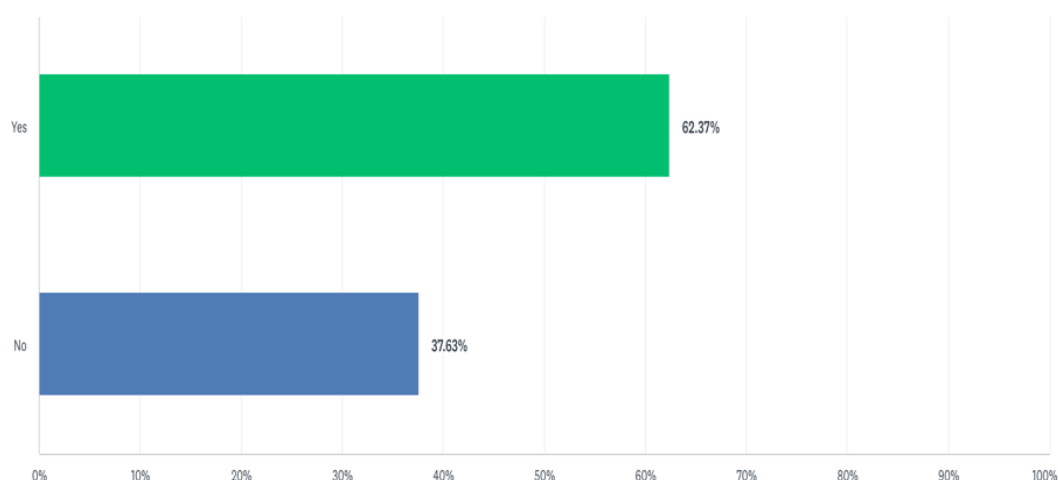
Result: 62.37% of respondents said they think the cost of implementation and policing the proposed Act is acceptable. 37.63% said they do not think the cost of implementation and policing is acceptable. A sample of responses is also provided below:

- “John Blair’s Bill closely follows the Hunting With Dogs legislation in Scotland. This Act came into force in October 2023 and has not resulted in any extra financial burden on the farming community, Government agencies or Police Scotland”
- “How can we put a price against inhumanity?”
- “There are better things the for the police to do such as knife crime and gang violence”
- “Enforcing most crimes is expensive. Fining those responsible will cover some of the costs”
- “I would pay more taxes to ensure this is policed”
- “Can we spend money on policing crime and fixing our nation’s health crisis”
- “The cost to implement the UK Hunting Act has been unjustified and ineffective”
- “A total waste of time and tax payers money”
- “Police resources are already stretched”
- “The funds required to uphold a law are a necessity, therefore acceptable. There is no point in implementing a law and not enforce it in its entirety when protection from suffering is at the heart of it”

Do you think the cost of implementation and policing the proposed Act is acceptable?



Answered: 12,011 Skipped: 0



Annex Two: Breakdown Of NI-Only E-Consultation Responses

This section concentrates exclusively on the answers from participants who indicated in Question 3 that they reside in Northern Ireland. This focus is essential as it offers a more precise depiction of the overall opinion of the Northern Ireland public regarding the proposed Bill, especially considering that 59.5% of responses came from individuals who reported not living in Northern Ireland.

Given the high volume of responses received, only closed-ended questions are included in this section.

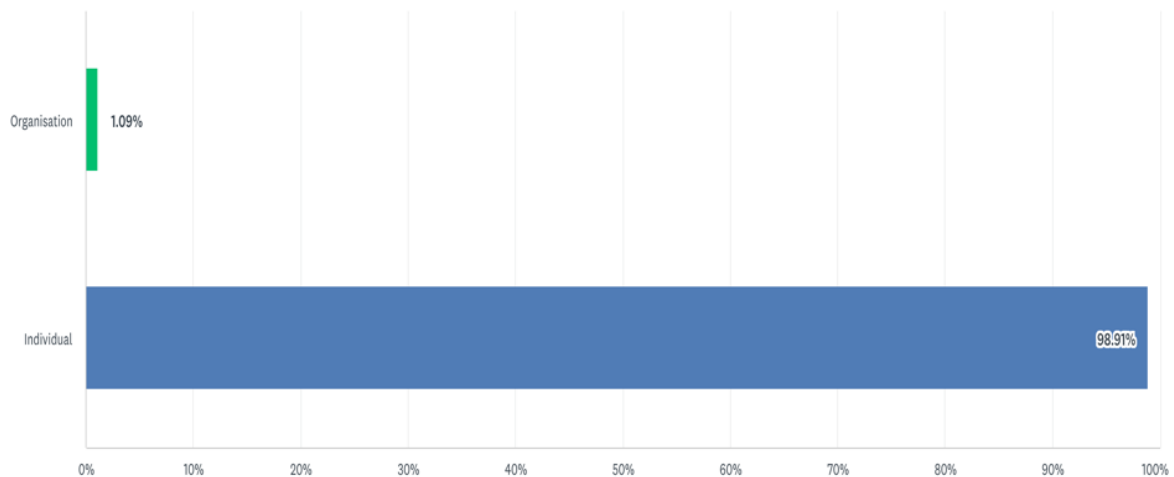
Question 1: This question asked respondents whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.

Result: 98.91% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they were responding as an individual, with 1.09% responding on behalf of an organisation.

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?



Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0



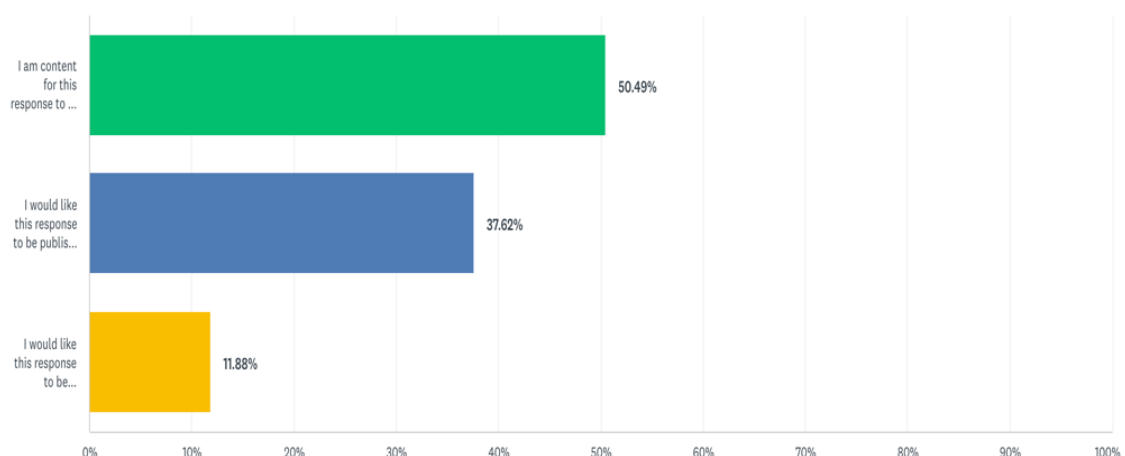
Question 2: This question asked respondents whether or not they wished their response to be published and attributed to themselves/their organisation, published anonymously, or considered but not published.

Result: 50.49% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they are content for their response to be published and attributed to them or their organisation; 37.62% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they would like their response to be published anonymously; and 11.88% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they would like their response to be considered but not published.

Please choose one of the following

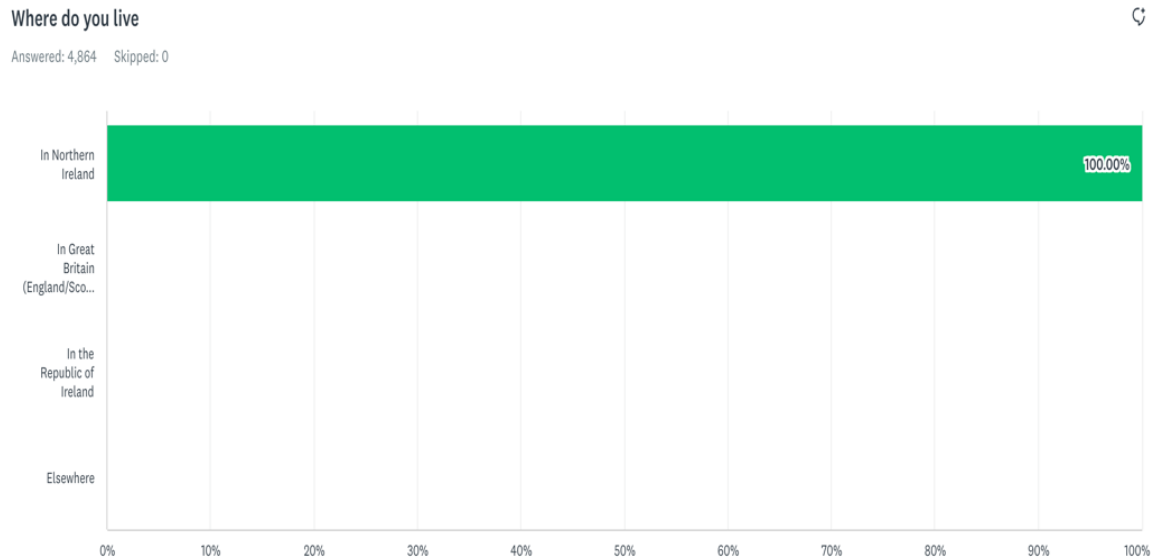


Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0



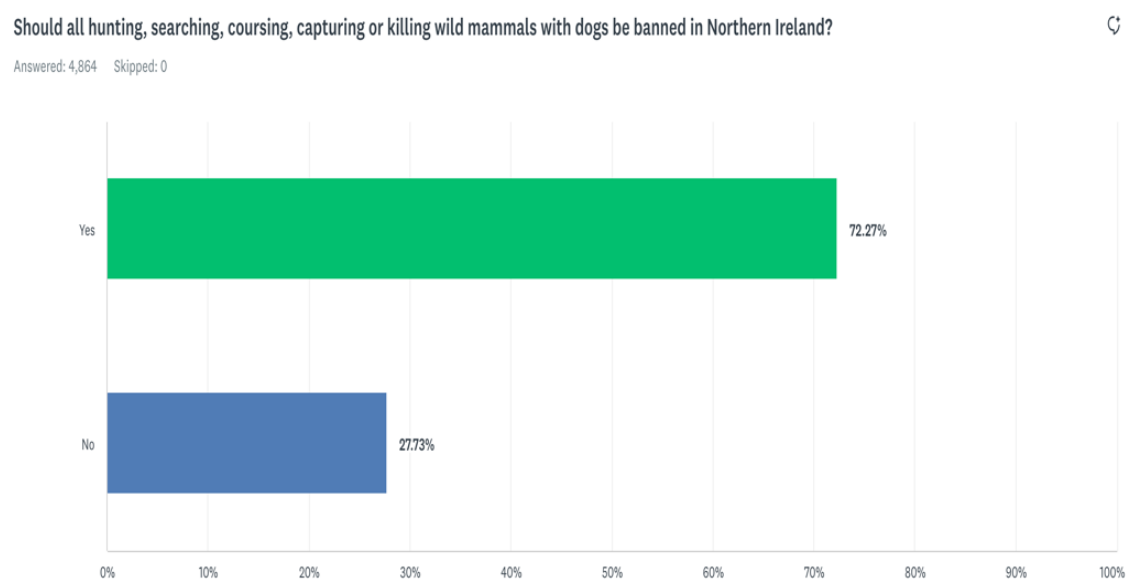
Question 3: This question asked respondents where they lived.

Result: As this section focuses on only respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland, the graph is indicative of this.



Question 4: Should all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs be banned in Northern Ireland?

Result: An overwhelming majority of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland (72.27%) said all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs should be banned in Northern Ireland. Whereas, 27.73% who said they lived in Northern Ireland opposed a ban being implemented in Northern Ireland.

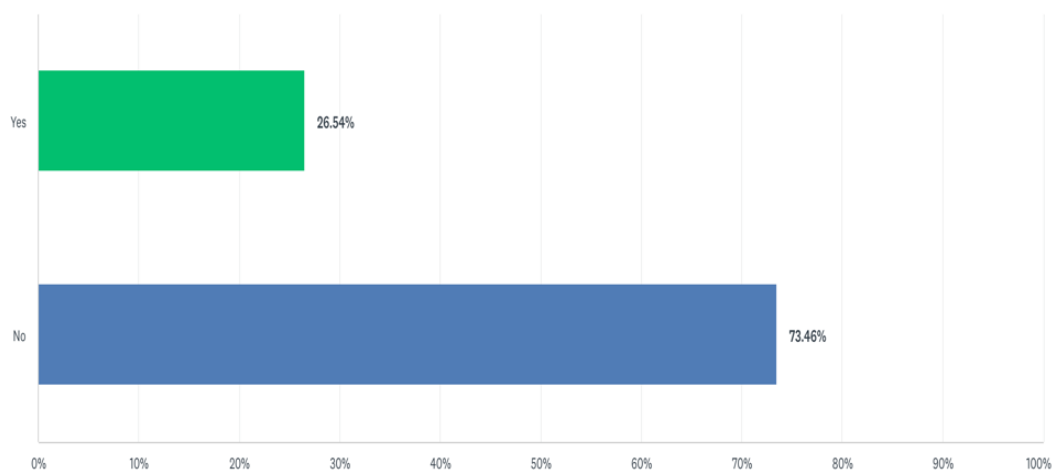


Question 5: Terrier work, and flushing, is a legal activity in Northern Ireland and the term describes dogs being put underground to attack and potentially kill a wild animal. Once a wild animal has gone to ground, is it acceptable to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover?

Result: 73.46% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said 'terrier work', the activity to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover, was unacceptable. 26.54% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland thought the practice was acceptable.

Terrier work, and flushing, is a legal activity in Northern Ireland and the term describes dogs being put underground to attack and potentially kill ...

Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0

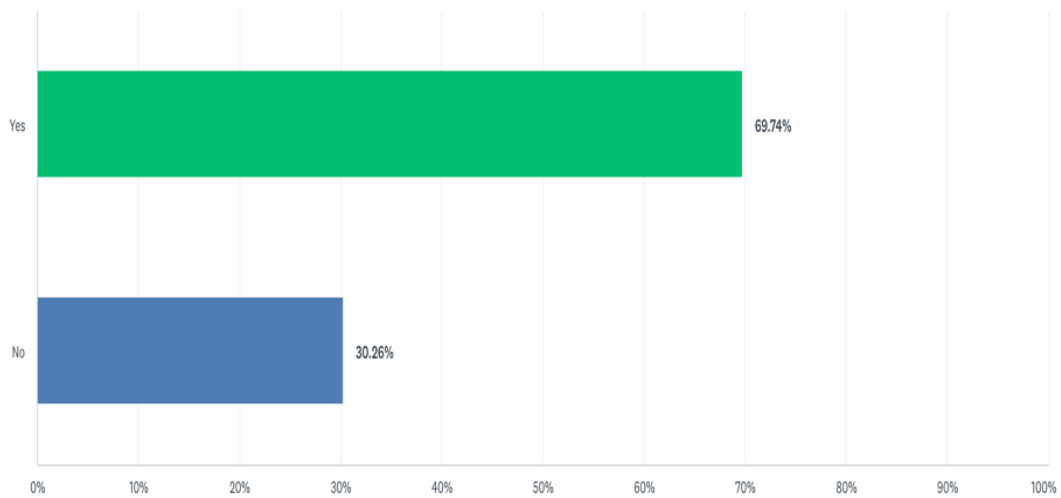


Question 6: Should trail hunting, the process in which one or more dogs are induced or permitted to follow the scent of a wild mammal (whether the trail of scent has been laid naturally or by human intervention) be banned in Northern Ireland?

Result: 69.74% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said trail hunting, the process in which one or more dogs are induced or permitted to follow the scent of a wild mammal (whether the trail of scent has been laid naturally or by human intervention) be banned in Northern Ireland. 30.26% of respondents thought the practice was acceptable.

Should trail hunting, the process in which one or more dogs are induced or permitted to follow the scent of a wild mammal (whether the trail of sc...

Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0

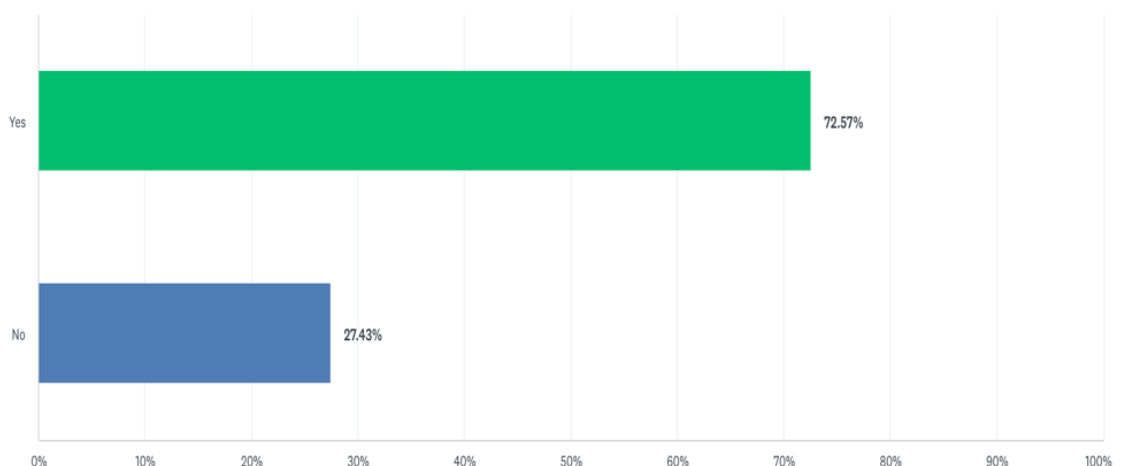


Question 7: Should the law make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity?

Result: 72.57% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said the law should make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity. 27.43% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland opposed this suggestion.

Should the law make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted per...

Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0

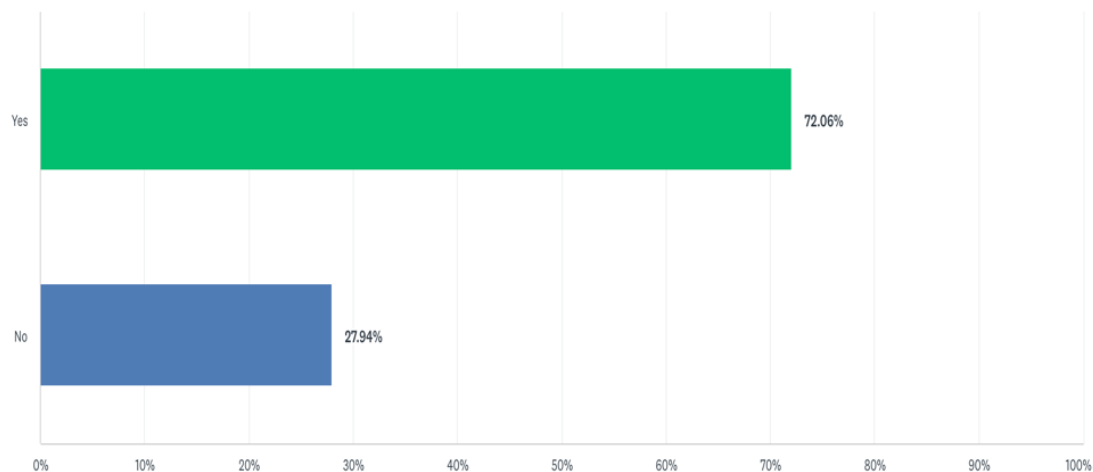


Question 8: Should people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves be liable to prosecution?

Result: 72.06% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves, should be liable to prosecution. 27.94% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland opposed this suggestion.

Should people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don't hunt themselves be liable to prosecution?

Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0



Question 9: What sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill?

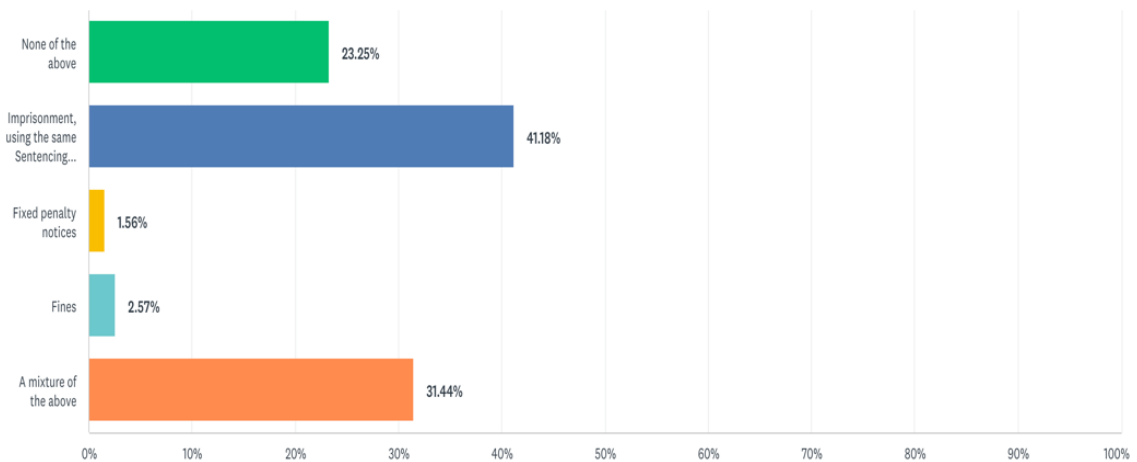
Result: When asked what sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill:

- 41.18% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **imprisonment**, using the same Sentencing Schedule currently in place for the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011
- 1.56% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **fixed penalty notices**
- 2.57% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **finest**
- 31.44% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **a mixture of the above**
- 23.25% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **none of the above**

What sort of penalties should be available for persons found guilty of offences under the proposed bill?



Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0



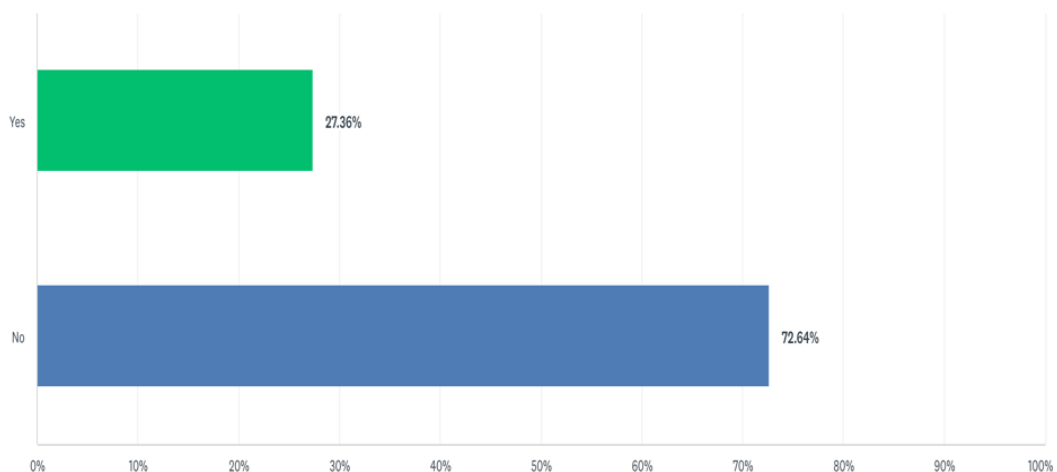
Question 11: Do you foresee any unintended consequences of the proposed law? If yes, what safeguards could be put in place to mitigate against these?

Result: 72.64% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they do not foresee any unintended consequences of the proposed law. 27.36% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they do foresee unintended consequences.

Do you foresee any unintended consequences of the proposed law? If yes, what safeguards could be put in place to mitigate against these?



Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0



Question 12: To what extent do you support the ambitions of the Bill?

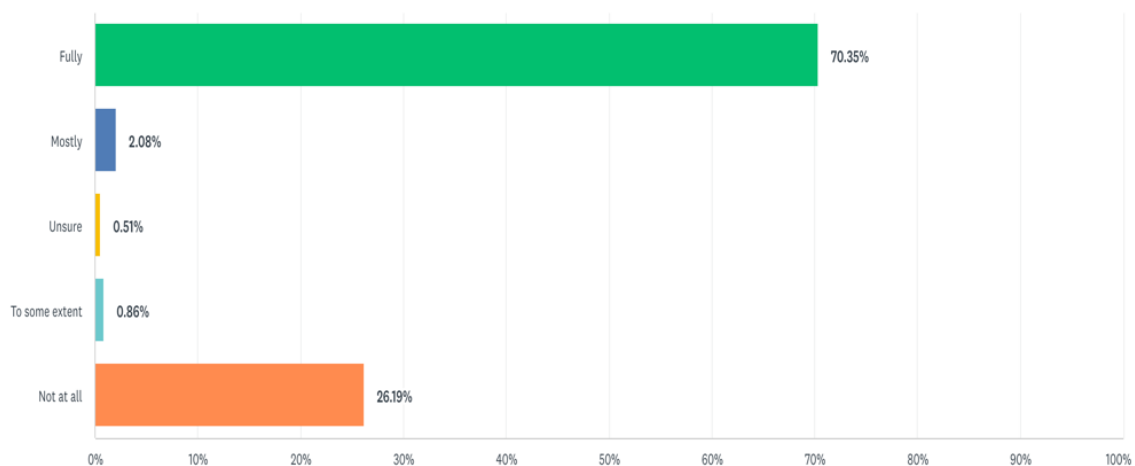
Result: When asked to what extent they support the ambition of the Bill:

- 70.35% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **fully**
- 2.08% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **mostly**
- 0.51% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **unsure**
- 0.86% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **to some extent**
- 26.19% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said **not at all**

To what extent do you support the ambitions of the Bill?



Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0



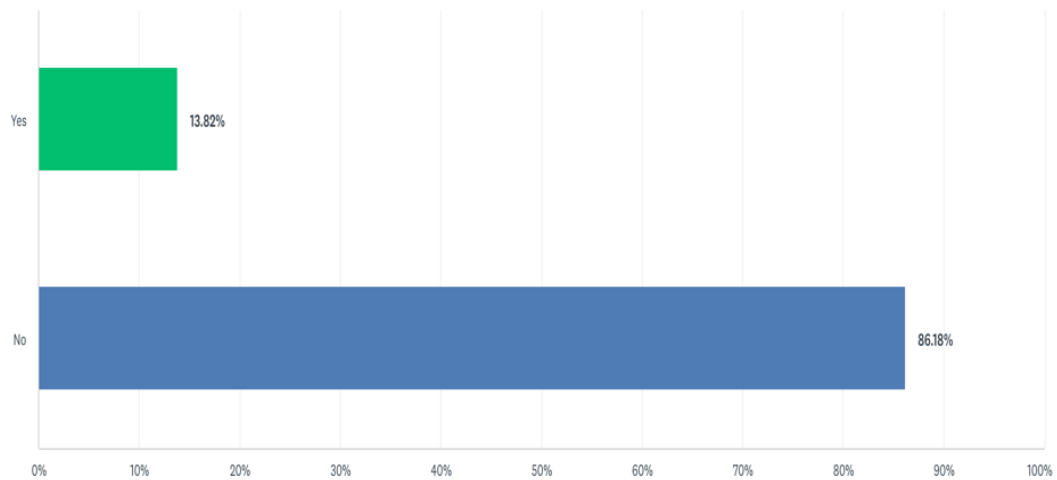
Question 15: Do you have any suggestions as to how the ambitions of the proposal could be improved?

Result: 86.18% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they had no suggestions as to how the ambitions of the proposal could be improved. 13.82% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland answered 'yes' to this question.

Do you have any suggestions as to how the ambitions of the proposal could be improved?



Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0



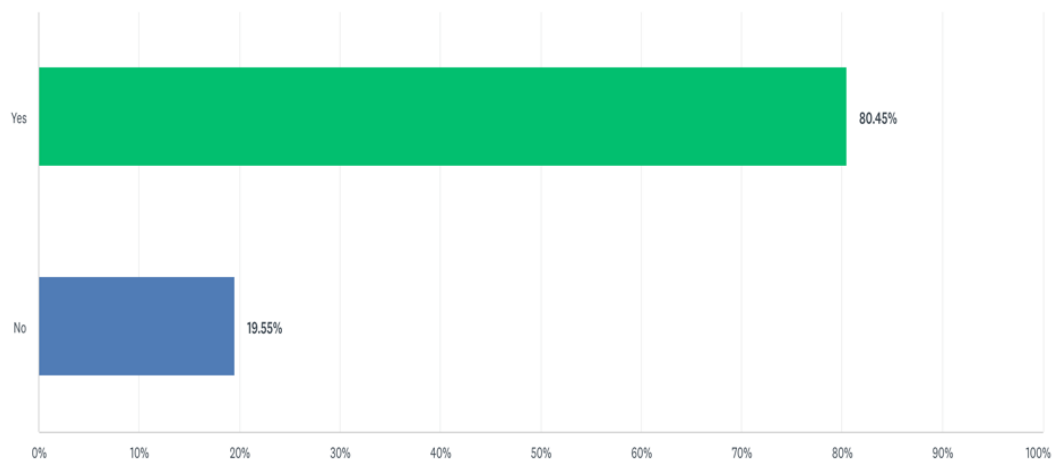
Question 16: Is ending hunting wild mammals with dogs important to you?

Result: An overwhelming majority (80.45%) of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said ending hunting wild mammals with dogs is important to them. 19.55% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said it was not important to them.

Is ending hunting wild mammals with dogs important to you?



Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0



Question 17: Do you think the cost of implementation and policing the proposed Act is acceptable?

Result: 71.36% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they think the cost of implementation and policing the proposed Act is acceptable. 28.64% of respondents who said they lived in Northern Ireland said they do not think the cost of implementation and policing is acceptable.

Do you think the cost of implementation and policing the proposed Act is acceptable?



Answered: 4,864 Skipped: 0

