

## Sporting Gun

### Lead Ammunition Group

What I do on holiday is not normally relevant to my day job in shooting or BASC. Suffice to say that diving with sharks in remote conditions, which is what I have been doing, bears significant resemblance to recently published conjecture about the Lead Ammunition Group.

On return, over the past 24 hours, I have brought myself up to date with what has been doing the rounds, both published by sporting journals and echoed in the web forums and some frankly scurrilous e-mail round-robins.

If I were truly “a man from Mars”, I might gain the impression from this material that the British shooter is preoccupied by conspiracy theories and prone to swallow any old rusty tin can that floats past the end of his nose.

Since I am not from Mars but have had the privilege of working with the shooting world for thirty eight years I know that – while indeed there are one or two who wear the above description as a badge of honour – the majority just wants to be told the truth and is well able to grasp new realities.

If this were not so I would not have accepted the challenging task of chairing the new Lead Ammunition Group. Nor would I have accepted if the invitation extended to me by Defra and the Food Standards Agency was not supported by the Chief Executives of all the organisations including the shooting ones that are to be involved – in addition to the unanimous support of the BASC Council.

It is entirely reasonable for shooting and country journals to challenge and speculate colourfully, so long as readers are informed that the true purpose of the Lead Ammunition Group (the Group) is to bring together relevant stakeholders and experts to advise Defra as the principal government agency responsible for environment, and the Food Standards Agency as the principal agency involved with food standards.

This is therefore a significant opportunity for stakeholders to take charge of their destiny.

The Group is tasked with looking at the key threats to wildlife from lead ammunition, the respective levels of those threats, and exploring possible solutions to any *significant* threats (my italics).

The Group is charged with advising on possible options for managing any risk to human health from *increased* exposure to lead as a result of using lead ammunition.

We have also been asked to advise on perceived threats *that the evidence indicates are not significant*.

In doing this it also falls within our remit to advise on knowledge gaps that may hinder the identification or assessment of threats, the development of technical solutions or government policy.

We also have to consider communications issues, and possible solutions, concerning the relaying of balanced information to the media, general public and stakeholders e.g. shooters and shooting trades.

It is also our job to alert Defra and FSA to any significant impacts of possible advice or solutions on shooting activity and associated recreational, wildlife management, economic and employment benefits. In other words, any advice we come up with must take account of the possible consequences for shooting.

Other important safeguards have been built into the process. Defra kicked the process off in response to information and concerns brought to their attention, but have avoided making this a governmental committee. They have placed responsibility in the hands of the shooting community in conjunction with representatives from the wider worlds of conservation, animal welfare, human food safety and gun and ammunition makers and traders.

The second safeguard against the process running out of control has been to keep things tight by establishing a small high level group to take strategic decisions and set up and give direction to subgroups (making up the Group as a whole) thus bringing in other organisations and experts.

Inevitably there have been important people from all sides who have wanted to be included on the strategic group. That was not advisable in the first instance, without risking the group becoming dangerously unwieldy. All enthusiasm, evidence and opinions will be engaged through specialist sub-groups.

The shooting world should take particular comfort that the strategic group will include well-known names with experience of shooting each bringing a wealth of experience to the table – Steve Tapper from GWCT, John Batley from GTA, Rob Gray from CA, Adrian Gane from CLA and Stephen Crouch from the National Game Dealers Association.

They will be working under my chairmanship in conjunction with Mark Avery from RSPB, Debbie Pain from WWT, James Kirkwood from the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, and Professor Len Levy from the Institute of Environment and Health.

There will also be representatives in attendance from Defra, who provide limited secretariat support for the strategic group, and FSA.

And before anyone suggests otherwise, none of us receives any remuneration or expenses – so the Group will not be torched by a new government hell bent on cost saving. In fact the whole process meshes closely with the Conservative Manifesto pledge to reduce “government” and put trust in real people to deal with the issues that affect them.

So the first meeting of the strategic group will take place on 26 April and will concern itself with procedure, working practices, decision making, communications and the sub-groups – essentially talks about talks. What follows thereafter remains to be seen

– but it is my intention as chairman to ensure that the Group’s workings are as inclusive and open as possible.

Who knows what the future holds? All I know is that these are serious issues for us all to address and at the end of the first year the Group must produce a written report on progress for Defra and FSA.

I can see no inclination on the part of either Labour or Conservative politicians to enact a Lead Bill. But there are other forces at work in regard to food standards and in Europe concerning heavy metals in the environment.

Hence I make no presumption about what the Group’s year-end report will contain; but because the shooting interests are so well represented on the strategic group – leave aside any sub-groups who are equally part of the process – anything incapable of peer review and strict scrutiny will not see the light of day. Much careful thought has been given over the past two years to the issues that have resulted in the process that has now been put in place.

This not a headlong dash towards a lead ban – anything but - and anybody who uses that language is storming paper castles and basking in the luxury of not having to take responsibility.

This is the time for shooters to seize the opportunity with both hands, take responsibility and address these issues constructively.

And if you want to know the BASC Council’s very firm position on this matter it is published and periodically updated on the BASC website for all to see.