

HUNTING ACT

I fully appreciate the desire on the part of some to further amend and strengthen the Hunting Act (2004) which was, to say the least, an imperfect piece of legislation.

I yield to nobody in my commitment to seek an end to the hunting of wild animals with dogs: in the early days I was one of very few Conservative Members of Parliament (in the blessed company of the late Sir David Amess and the late Sir Teddy Taylor) who were prepared to voice antihunt opinions. The legislation introduced under Blair's Government, which in the view of many did not go far enough, at least managed to achieve a passage through both Houses of Parliament and I was honoured to receive the RSPCA's Richard Martin award in respect of my endeavours to support that legislation.

All that said I also understand the desire to further inhibit the unwelcome aspects of trail and drag hunting.

I now have to offer a word of caution: while all those of us on our side of the fence would like to see more robust legislation the fact remains that very many hours of Parliamentary time were devoted to this Act and there is a very considerable danger — because legislation is a two way traffic — that attempts to amend the Act might lead not only to possible improvements but far more probably to attempts on the part of those who wish to continue to pursue hunting to further dilute the legislation and I am sure that that is not the desired intention! I would say to you, therefore, "yes we must continue to monitor and pursue this matter — but we must do so with very considerable caution".