



Marie Rimmer CBE, MP
Member of Parliament for St. Helens
South & Whiston
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Tel: 020 7219 4847/01744 752075

Hunting Act:

I believe this cruel blood sport has no place in our country and should be consigned to the history books. I am committed to enhancing and strengthening the Hunting Act, closing loopholes that allow for the illegal hunting of foxes, deer and hares.

I want to see tough action against those who continue to conduct illegal fox hunts. I believe enforcement of existing law remains difficult until action is taken to strengthen it and to stop trail hunting from being used as a cover for illegal hunting.

I am aware that a director of the Master of Foxhounds Association was last year found guilty of encouraging and assisting others to evade the ban on fox hunting.

The UK Government believes that the Hunting Act is sufficient and that it is for individual landowners to choose whether they would like hunts to take place on their land.

In my view it is completely irresponsible for trail hunts to be allowed to take place on public land and it is a good decision that the National Trust has agreed to the motion passed by its members recently to ban trail hunting on its land. I am aware that many other landowners including Forestry England and Natural Resources Wales have suspended trail hunting on their land.

I also support a ban on the use of dogs below ground to force wild mammals to escape and be hunted. It is not only cruel to the wild animal being flushed out, but to the dogs who risk being forced into a dangerous confrontation. I understand that this practice can lead to some of the worst cruelty cases associated with hunting. There is also a risk that it is used as a cover for illegal hunting with dogs.

I can assure you that I fully support the bans on fox hunting, deer hunting and hare coursing and will continue to press at every possible opportunity for the existing legislation to be strengthened.

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Constituency Office:

Marie Rimmer CBE, MP, 2nd Floor, Century House, Hardshaw Street, St. Helens WA10 1QU, 01744 752075,
marie.rimmer.mp@parliament.uk
Website: www.marierimmer.co.uk