

The Wildlife Trusts Approach to The Lobbying Act

As a member of The Wildlife Trusts movement, Ulster Wildlife recognises the need for charities to avoid political bias – particularly in the run up to major elections. We also believe wholeheartedly in the right of charities to express views on issues of public policy that relate directly to their charitable objectives. Many advances in social and environmental policy have been secured as a result of charities advocating beneficial changes and all our lives are better for it.

We have a vision of an environment rich in wildlife, for everyone. To achieve it, we are working to create Living Landscapes, secure Living Seas and to inspire people to value and take action for wildlife and the natural world: in and around the places that are important to them; at home, at work, at school. Society gains many clear public benefits from our work, in communities right across the country.

We believe that there are many ways in which the UK Government can contribute to improving the natural world and help The Wildlife Trusts to achieve our charitable aims. For it to do this, the politicians and political parties that influence the priorities, decisions and actions of the Government need to understand what we are trying to achieve, why it is important to society and what they can do to help. It is important that they adopt policies and pass laws that strengthen the natural environment and its ability to underpin the health and wellbeing of society and the economy. It is vital that they appreciate the enormous value that the public place on our wildlife and wild places, and reflect this in their decisions.

In the run up to the 2015 UK General Election, all non-political organisations are required to take particular notice of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 (the Lobbying Act), which became law on 30th January 2014. It changes the established rules relating to activities undertaken by non-party campaigners (including charities), which could reasonably be regarded as being intended to influence the outcome of national elections in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland (including the UK General Election).

The Act aims to ensure that between 19th September 2014 and 7th May 2015 expenditure intended to influence the voting decisions of the general public is kept within reasonable limits and is reported openly, clearly and concisely. All organisations intending to spend more than £20K in England, or more than £10K in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, on a specified set of 'regulated activities' must register with the Electoral Commission and report all their regulated campaigning expenditure to them.

The Wildlife Trusts do not intend to register with the Electoral Commission, as during the restricted period, we will be focusing our efforts on influencing the policies that will be adopted and promoted by the political parties and individual candidates, rather than on influencing the way in which the public votes at the election. We will champion the

natural environment – on land and at sea – and will be working to gain support for our views from politicians from right across the political spectrum.

We will be promoting our views directly to our members and committed supporters, to journalists and the media, and to the politicians and political parties themselves, highlighting legislation and policies that will help nature to recover, as we have done for many years. We will aim to ensure that anything that we communicate directly to the general public (on our website, in leaflets and posters, at events, through social media or in paid advertising) is factual, balanced and entirely independent of the views of those standing for election or those helping them to do so. We will continue to respond to government consultations and to contribute to public debates that are not directly related to the General Election, as you would expect. And we will continue our work to increase everyone's awareness and understanding of the natural world, and why it is a vital part of all our lives.

We won't be looking to support one candidate or another, or one party over the next, partly because as charities we are not allowed to, but mostly because the future of the natural environment on which we all ultimately depend is too important for it to become the subject of party political disagreement or mean self interest. It is vital to everyone. We will work impartially to promote this understanding in all our politicians, as we have done for more than 100 years.