



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

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Peatland Protection Team
Department for Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
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Sent to: HGBConsultation@defra.gov.uk

23rd May 2025

Dear Peatland Protection Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the 'Heather and Grass Burning in England' consultation. This response is provided on behalf of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). NFCC is the professional voice of UK Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs), comprising a council of UK Chief Fire Officers and a wider membership.

We have appended responses to the consultation questions relevant to FRSs at the end of this letter, but also wish to highlight broader considerations regarding the Government's overall approach to wildfire management.

We are increasingly concerned that policy decisions being made in certain areas of Government may conflict with those being developed elsewhere. For instance, whilst we fully support initiative that promote environmental protection and biodiversity, these policies are not always aligned with those to manage the risk of wildfire. Without appropriate mitigation measures, such initiatives could inadvertently lead to increased fire loads and the risk of larger, more intense wildfires.

A more integrated, cross-Government approach to wildfire prevention, mitigation, response and recovery is urgently needed. This should include the development of a national wildfire strategy that brings together all relevant stakeholders from across the four UK nations.

We are particularly concerned that some of the proposals outlined in this consultation may have unintended negative consequences. Further restricting land managers' ability to use prescribed burning as a wildfire prevention tool could compromise FRS preparedness and response, increasing the danger to firefighters and the public. Wildfires have become an increasingly common part of FRS response and prevention activities as the UK experiences more extreme weather events due to climate change. Wildfires are starting earlier in the season and typically last longer due to prolonged higher temperatures.

Responding to wildfires requires a significant amount of FRS resources, both in terms of the number of firefighters and the amount of equipment required, often over prolonged periods of days or even weeks. This is especially challenging in a context of increasing financial pressures, as wildfire response is not separately funded and falls under the general duty of FRSs to extinguish fires. Any changes to regulations that inadvertently increase the

frequency or severity of wildfires would further stretch already limited resources and could impact FRSS' ability to keep communities safe.

Further detail on some of these issues can be found in [NFCC's Wildfires Position Statement](#), which outlined the actions we believe are necessary to strengthen the UK's approach to wildfire management. We welcome continued engagement with your department and colleagues across Government, and would be pleased to discuss these matters in more detail.

Yours sincerely,



John Roberts

NFCC Operational Preparedness, Response and Resilience Committee Chair
Chief Fire Officer
West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Heather and Grass Burning in England

NFCC Consultation Response

Confidentiality Question

Would you like your response to be confidential?

☐ Yes

☒ No

About you

We are asking you to provide your contact details so that we can contact you if we have any queries about your response or if we wish to ask you to provide further information to add to the response that you have given. You must complete this section so that we can consider the views and information submitted.

1. What is your name?

National Fire Chiefs Council

2. What is your contact email or postal address?

PublicPolicy@nfcc.org.uk

3. In what capacity are you responding to this consultation? (Select all that apply)

☐ Landowner

☐ Land manager

☐ (Farmer/private/estate)

☐ Land manager (eNGO / Charity)*

☐ Member of the public

☒ Organisation*

☐ Public Body*

☐ Other*

***Please specify:** NFCC is an independent membership association and charity comprised of a council of Chief Fire Officers and is the professional voice of UK fire and rescue services (FRSs). Our overarching aim is to lead, support and coordinate prevention, protection, resilience and emergency response across FRSs so that they can meet changing demands and keep communities safe. NFCC has a unique role in representing FRSs at a national level and leads on driving improvement and development throughout FRSs, while supporting strong leadership – including for the devolved administrations.

Consultation Questions

A1: Do you agree with the proposal to change the boundaries of the Regulations to LFA to protect more upland peatlands?

NFCC is supportive of Government efforts to protect the environmental sustainability and biodiversity of the UK's ecosystems, and is also supportive of licensing measures to ensure that burns are being undertaken at the correct time, by those with the correct training, and for the right reasons. Nevertheless, NFCC is concerned that placing further restrictions on prescribed burns, the likelihood and severity of wildfires during the summer could be increased.

The proposed changes to boundaries from peat over 40cm deep to Less Favoured Areas will disproportionately impact FRSs in the north of England, many of which have historically seen higher risk of wildfire due to large expanses of rural, vegetated, upland areas. We call on the Government to ensure a balanced approach is taken between protecting the environment and the health of communities, whilst also minimising the risk of wildfires by continuing to ensure that licences are permitted where properly justified.

Prescribed burning during the winter months has proven to be an effective tool in lessening the risk and severity of wildfires. Whilst both NFCC and FRSs are conscious of the environmental and health impacts from prescribed burns and the resultant smoke emitted, if the change in regulations were to result in more wildfires, this would result in far greater environmental damage and the release of smoke in far greater quantities over a larger area.

A3: Do you agree with the proposed change of the prohibition of burning on peat over 40cm deep to peat over 30cm deep?

☐ Yes

☒ No

Please provide reasons why. (Please limit your response to 250 words)

NFCC cannot support the proposed extension of prohibition of burning on peat to over 30cm deep. Such a change would greatly reduce the area of countryside where wildfire risk can be managed using prescribed burning. NFCC and FRSs agree with Government's aim to protect the UK's peatlands and to prevent the release of carbon into the atmosphere through unnecessary peat fires. However, the evidence presented in support of this change, as well as the stated benefits, are not sufficiently compelling and do not outweigh the greater flexibility that maintaining a limit above 40cm would provide for effective wildfire risk management.

Deep peat fires during the prescribed burning season are very unusual and are far more likely to occur during the summer months when the ground is drier. Prescribed burns undertaken at the right time, by the right people, with the right training have proven to be an effective land management tool. Reducing the limit to peat over 30cm deep could have the perverse effect of causing more damage to the UK's peat habitats by leading to more wildfires in the summer months that burn more intensely over a far larger area than prescribed burning, which could have mitigated the risk.

**A4: Under what ground(s) would you be most likely to apply for a licence to burn?
(Please limit your response to 250 words)**

FRSs do not currently directly apply for a licence to burn, however, some FRSs will collaborate with land managers who are performing a prescribed burn under a licence in order to undertake live fire training. It is currently unclear how the Regulations may impact on these activities. We request confirmation from Government that FRSs will not be required to apply for licences in order to undertake live fire training, and that collaborative approaches alongside licenced land managers can continue.

A5: Do you agree that ground (d) *because the specified vegetation is inaccessible to mechanical cutting equipment and any other method of management is impracticable* should be removed?

☐ Yes

☒ No

Please provide reasons why. (Please limit your response to 250 words)

NFCC does not support removing ground (d). In some areas, any method of management other than a prescribed burn will be impractical due to the terrain or accessibility. NFCC is concerned that, by removing this ground for a licence, land managers may have no practical means of managing the vegetation in this area. This could lead to the unintended consequence of increasing wildfire risk by making these areas harder to manage.

Whilst we recognise that land managers will still be able to apply for a licence under ground (c) to reduce the risk of wildfire, we believe that the additional reasoning provided by ground (d) will help to justify why a prescribed burn is necessary in some cases. The risk of a prescribed burn being used as a first rather than last resort is mitigated by the fact that the licence will have to be approved by Natural England based on their own assessment, ensuring scrutiny and oversight.

However, it is not clear how Natural England would assess an application for a licence purely for the purposes of reducing wildfire risk. NFCC would not wish to see a situation whereby the grounds for a licence become so stringent as to effectively prevent a licence from being issued in all but extreme cases. Such an outcome could lead to some landscapes no longer being managed for certain activities, thus greatly increasing the risk of wildfires.

A6: Do you agree with adding ‘research’ as a ground to apply for a licence under the Regulations?

☒ Yes

☐ No

Please provide reasons why. (Please limit your response to 250 words)

NFCC is supportive of efforts to enable research into the effectiveness of prescribed burns as a way of reducing wildfire risk. Enabling further research to take place in areas covered by the Regulations could facilitate further research into areas such as vegetation management and the effects of prescribed burns on peat. Such research would provide a stronger evidence base, allowing land managers to be more informed as to what is good versus bad practice. Therefore, we believe it reasonable to allow licensing for research purposes to prevent unnecessary barriers and enable further learning.

A7: Would you support a move to link the revised Heather & Grass Management Code to the Regulations, making it compulsory to follow rather than advisable?

☒ Yes

☐ No

Please provide reasons why. (Please limit your response to 250 words)

NFCC is strongly supportive of mandating adherence to the Heather & Grass Management Code. Not only do we believe that greater alignment between the UK nations is beneficial, but it will also make the requirements placed on practitioners clearer. By making it compulsory to follow the Code, it will be much easier for practitioners to demonstrate how they have complied with the Regulations, thus improving transparency and the confidence practitioners can provide to FRSs that proper and safe procedures have been followed.

A8: Would you support a move to make it a requirement to complete an accredited training course prior to burning under a licence granted under the Regulations?

☒ Yes, for all practitioners

☐ Yes, for supervisory practitioners only

☐ No

Please provide reasons why. (Please limit your response to 250 words)

NFCC is supportive of requiring all practitioners to receive accredited training prior to burning under a licence. This will enhance safety by ensuring that practitioners are properly qualified and aware of the risks posed by prescribed burns. We would encourage Government to require training to include a section on completing a Wildfire Risk Management Plan and then using prescribed burning as part of that management to reduce risk. This would help to enhance good practice as part of wider wildfire management.

However, it is essential that training makes a clear distinction between management of fires for the purpose of a prescribed burn versus attempting to extinguish a wildfire. Training should not give learners the impression that they are now qualified to fight fires professionally. We would not wish to see a situation whereby training implies that land managers have a responsibility to try to extinguish a wildfire that may have started on the land they have responsibility for, just because they have received training around undertaking a prescribed burn. Training should make clear that the appropriate response in the case of a wildfire is still to dial 999 to request assistance from the local FRS. More detail will be needed on the exact wording of a training requirement and NFCC would encourage further engagement from Government on this matter.