

## Statement

02.03.2023, Nürnberg

### **Statement by Graham Downing, President World Forum on Shooting Activities, for the opening of IWA OutdoorClassics 2023**

Check against delivery!

It is a great pleasure to be here again in Nuremburg and at IWA, an event which I look forward to every year, since it provides the perfect opportunity to see what products are new on the European hunting and shooting scene, and of course to meet and exchange news with a lot of old friends.

I am now a year into my term as President of the World Forum on Shooting Activities and I think it is about time that I said a little both about myself and about the World Forum.

I am a hunter. I started accompanying my father out waterfowling and rough shooting for pheasants, pigeons and other game birds and animals at the age of 12. On my 15th birthday I received my first shotgun, a single barrelled AYA 12 gauge, and two boxes of cartridges. I was told that for every bird I shot, I would receive three more cartridges. When I got towards the bottom of the second box and had shot nothing, I was getting very worried, but my father was a kind man and always gave me more. From that moment onwards I grew up as a hunter, and since then I have been lucky enough to hunt game and waterfowl in many wonderful places around Europe. Of course today I have rather more than one AYA shotgun, and I am particularly proud of my collection of English large bore waterfowling guns.

When I was in my thirties I started hunting with a rifle, and today I must say that this is now something I enjoy most of all. At home in England I stalk deer in the woodlands near where I live and I have a passion for the little deer we

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call muntjac. I shoot many of them across the farms and estates where I manage deer, including across my own farm. Muntjac are small, they are always on the move and you need to shoot quickly and accurately, which is why they are such a challenging quarry to hunt. But I also love driven hunting with a rifle. It's not something we have in England, but I really cherish the opportunities I get to attend driven hunts here in continental Europe.

The World Forum on Shooting Activities is an international organisation comprised of more than 50 national hunting, sport shooting and firearms industry bodies from across Europe, America, Australasia and even Africa, and it represents over 100 million sport shooters around the world. It is recognised as an official non-governmental organisation by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations General Assembly, and it is one of the few NGOs that have been invited to speak before one of the five committees of the UN General Assembly. Last June I had the privilege of addressing the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons at the UN headquarters in New York.

It's important that we do these things. I've spent forty years working for shooting and countryside organisations and it's clear to me that the regulations we have to face usually have their roots in international law and treaties. If we are to avoid unnecessary and unfair restrictions on our shooting activities then it's essential that we engage at the international level to help shape those treaties before they filter down to national level. Whether it's regulations on the marking of firearms, the hunting of migratory birds or lead ammunition, if the international law is not favourable and our own national governments have already ratified an international treaty, then lobbying within our own national or local governments can be little more than useless. So we have to work at international level.

And lobbying, whether it is done at international or national level, is at its best when it is coordinated. Today in our increasingly urban society we have many voices against hunting and against the possession and use of firearms, so if we are going to succeed in protecting our sports and our traditions, we must act together. There may be lots of different bodies involved, and that is not in itself bad, but they all need to be saying the same things.

In the UK we have lots of different organisations in the shooting and hunting world. Organisations for different branches of target shooting, clay shooting, hunting, the gun trade. All have different views and perspectives, but we regularly meet together under the umbrella of the British Shooting Sports Council, of which I am the Secretary. We share information and co-ordinate our views. That means when we speak to Government it is like a chorus of voices all saying the same thing in slightly different ways. That is utterly essential. If we disagree amongst ourselves and all express different views to Government, then we are lost immediately. If we all make the same reasonable arguments, then we get listened to.

The same is true at international level, as with the excellent work of FACE representing 7 million European hunters. And WFSA works to the same principle of gaining a consensus position amongst its members.

I have mentioned the threats we face from an ever more urban society which has less and less in common with the rural traditions such as hunting and shooting. If we are to maintain those traditions, we must constantly look for ways to engage with society at large. I believe that one of these is through the food we eat.

Over the past two decades there has been a massive surge of interest in wild and natural food, along with artisan produced food of local provenance. Game meat ticks all the boxes. It is totally natural, low in fat, healthy and of course delicious. It is the true and authentic taste of the countryside, and I think we should be doing much more to promote it.

I know that here in Germany there's a much more established culture of eating game meat than there is in the UK, but we have an awful lot of game birds and huge numbers of deer. Our Government tells us that there are more deer now in the British countryside than at any time in the last thousand years, and that we should be shooting many more of them.

That potentially means more opportunities for hunting for many more people, a bigger market for rifles, equipment and accessories, but only if we can promote the eating of venison. I process almost all the venison I shoot for sale at a local farmers market. That means every month I stand in front of a chilled display cabinet full of venison talking to customers about deer, and about how they are harvested from the local countryside.

People are fascinated to hear about how and why we hunt deer, and of course they love the venison and almost always come back for more. It's a wonderful way to promote hunting. I think each of us should be doing our best to promote game meat, and we should be encouraging our national governments to be taking a greater interest in it too.