

Lifeline £1M coronavirus fund announced for Scotland's country sports tourism sector

Hard hit country sports tourism businesses in Scotland are set to benefit from a £1M coronavirus fund following a concerted lobbying campaign by two of the sector's leading representative organisations.

The Scottish Government has come under mounting pressure from the Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group (SCSTG) and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) and who hit out at the decision to exclude country sports businesses from key funds for a second time.

VisitScotland – the body responsible for administering a number of tourism funds – has also been coming under heightened pressure to make support available to the country sports tourism sector without delay.

In an open letter to Fergus Ewing MSP and Kate Forbes MSP – the cabinet secretaries responsible for the funds – BASC described the situation as 'unprecedented' and said 'you cannot justify leaving country sports tourism businesses in the lurch for a second time'.

The representations made by the SCSTG and BASC led to a commitment by Fergus Ewing, the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Tourism, and VisitScotland officials to support the struggling sector via a dedicated fund.

Details of the £1M Scottish Country Sports Tourism Restart Fund have been announced today, with the fund opening to applications from impacted businesses next week.

The fund - which was jointly developed by the Scottish Government, Visit Scotland, the SCSTG and BASC - aims to assist the hardest hit businesses in the country sports tourism sector.

Eligible businesses include sporting agencies, land-based sporting businesses, sporting guides and fishing charter operators - all of which have experienced unprecedented hardship, disruption and financial loss as a result of the pandemic.

To ensure support reaches those in the greatest need, applicants are required to prove that 75% of their annual turnover originates from country sports tourism activity - a requirement that will likely exclude estates which tend to have numerous income streams.

SCSTG chairman, Rory Kennedy, said: "This fund is a vital lifeline for Scotland's country sports tourism sector.

"After a painful year, the fund will give the hardest hit businesses the means to survive. Various other rural sectors rely heavily on country sports tourism, so it is vital that its significant contribution is protected as far as possible.

"The Scottish Government's decision to rectify the lack of sector support is very welcome indeed, and we would like to thank VisitScotland for their speed in bringing this fund to fruition."

BASC Scotland's public affairs manager, Ross Ewing, said: "The arrival of the Scottish country sports tourism restart fund is a pivotal moment for the sector and the wider rural economy.

"Businesses have endured significant hardships and little support since the pandemic began, and we are grateful to the Scottish Government and VisitScotland for making a dedicated fund available to the country sports tourism sector.

"The fund will play a crucial role in helping businesses to safeguard jobs and protect investment in rural areas."

A spokesperson for VisitScotland said: "Country sports is a significant contributor to the Scottish economy and is considered to be a distinct sector that is extremely valuable to local and rural communities.

"It is estimated that the value of country sports tourism to the Scottish economy is £200m per year, with 8,800 full-time equivalent jobs being supported by the sector.

"The £1M fund is being delivered by VisitScotland on behalf of the Scottish Government and has been developed in consultation and collaboration with the SCSTG and BASC."