# Professor Iolo Madoc-Jones, Professor in Social and Criminal Justice

## On the challenges of enforcing the fox hunting ban

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**Professor Maria Hinfelaar:** Okay, I think we're all here. So, a really, good evening, noswaith dda everybody on what is already, the last in the series this academic year of our Wrexham Talks public lectures where we've had a vast range of topics being covered from the world of the Arts, the world of Sport Science, the world of Engineering and tonight we're going to hear about the Fox hunting ban. So more on that in a moment.

So it's really good to have so many here again this evening. We've got many colleagues, we've got governors, we have fellow students and of course staff of the university all here this evening and it also includes staff coming from different campuses, not only Wrexham and Regent Street, but also Northup who are here. There they are, that's Northup over there and it's in the right direction, it is over there.

So today's theme is going to be about looking at the fox hunting ban and how that's being implemented and enforced in Wales particularly and our speaker is Professor Iolo Madoc-Jones, who is a professor with the university, has been for several years, and his areas of academic interest including obviously the topic for tonight, but more broadly the whole field of criminal justice. Iolo is somebody who's on a second career because Iolo’s first career was in criminal justice within the criminal justice system, in the probation service where Iolo you were the Chief Probation Officer.

**Professor Iolo Madoc-Jones:** I wish.

**Professor Maria Hinfelaar:** High up in the world of probation and now, of course, he's high up in the world of academia and we're going to find out shortly.

Iolo’s PhD a number of years ago was looking at exploring how the Welsh language was being used in the criminal justice system in Wales, which is also a fascinating topic which would be worthy of another public lecture at some point but maybe you've already done that. That's certainly a very interesting theme as well.

Iolo is also published extensively in various journals in the criminal justice field and has done advisory work with Welsh Government, including the piece of work that we're going to hear about shortly. So, this is really good and it'll be a very interesting talk no doubt, and there will be time for some questions at the end. I'm supposed to say that you shouldn't be rustling any crisp packets that's in my crib sheets. Has anyone got a packet of crisps? Okay, so we're fine there.

All right, over to you Iolo.

**Professor Iolo Madoc-Jones:** Thank you Maria.

So, I'm going to start off with a with a very short video to sensitise us to the themes that we're looking at this evening now. It only lasts a minute, it shows the scene of confrontation at a hunt gathering, so if that's the kind of thing you find difficult then act accordingly. Once it's finished, I'll introduce myself properly and introduce the lecture properly as well so we'll just start off in that way.

[Video plays]

**Professor Iolo Madoc-Jones:** That’s by way of getting you all interested in the topic. As Maria said, I am Iolo Madoc-Jones and I am professor of Criminal and Social Justice here at Wrexham University. I'm also director of the Cyfiawnder: The Social Inclusion Research Institute. That's an institute set up in the Faculty of Social and Life Sciences to promote research, looking at issues to do with justice and social inclusion in the North East Wales area and beyond.

As Maria said, my background is in probation. I started off as a Senior Probation Officer, didn't quite make it to Chief, but it is nice that I'm considered worthy, and then became a Senior Probation Officer before moving to work at Bangor University as a lecturer before then coming here in 2001 to what was then the Northeast Wales Institute and I've been here ever since. This is actually my first public lecture, so I want to thank everybody for coming to see. It is reasonably full; you know can you imagine how embarrassing that would be if it was just me? So I really appreciate you all coming. I've teed it up so I hope you all know what you are in for, it's a talk about how well North Wales Police are enforcing the ban on fox hunting with hounds and policing incidents connected with hunting, so that's what I'm here to talk to you about today.

Now in my time here, I've done research on obviously, as Maria mentioned, on a range of topics related to the criminal justice system. I focussed on issues to do with domestic violence, children missing from home, I've done research on victims of crime as well, in a turn of events that makes people that know me chuckle at the irony of it, I've done quite a bit of research as well on alcohol misuse by people aged over 50. I've done lots of research for the Welsh Government on homelessness and housing and at the moment I'm working with colleagues from Cardiff and Glasgow University, exploring how we might optimise resettlement pathways for prison leavers facing homelessness.

Now, whenever I give that kind of resumé, I always feel like I should acknowledge that no career in university is ever built in isolation and I've been very lucky to have the support of my family, some of whom are here tonight, and also my colleagues in the areas of Criminology, Law, Social Policy and Policing. So I'm very grateful for their support and guidance over the years as well in getting that research portfolio assembled. But, whenever I'm out with family and friends, you know, drinking or having a meal, I've come to appreciate that nothing seems to interest people more than this research that I did for the Police and Crime Commissioner in 2022.

So, I want you to picture the scene, it's early 2022, we're just coming out of lockdown and I'm sat in my office thinking, ‘we've got to get back into the into the game now’ and I'm looking for research opportunities that staff involved in Cyfiawnder might be able to get involved in. I go to the websites where these kind of opportunities are advertised, one of them being the website of the Police and Crime Commissioner and I go there and I see that there's a commission there which seems quite interesting. It has its aims and objectives, the following. Now, there's a lot of words there for people to digest, but in essence, what the Police and Crime Commissioner is looking for is somebody, or an organisation, to undertake an independent review of how well North Wales Police are enforcing the ban on fox hunting with hounds and policing incidents connected with hunting. Now I've got to say, my initial reaction is ‘this isn't for me’. I don't have a footprint in this area at all, but but then I think about it for a couple of days and I think, well, actually, if the commission is for an independent review, then maybe actually that's what's required is for somebody to come from outside of this to take a look. In addition, it occurs to me that this might be exactly the kind of thing that would fit my bill, because as well as being an academic for the last 25 years, for 20 of them I've had a second career, which is where you might think that my probation background continues to that level because I've also worked for what is now His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons which essentially has meant for 4 to 5 weeks of every year, I've gone out with a team of inspectors to inspect aspects of youth justice, probation or prison practice. It occurs to me, actually, this is exactly the kind of commission that might require the sort of skills somebody with 20 years’ worth of experience of inspecting criminal justice practice against set national standards should have. So, emboldened by these thoughts and with the help of two colleagues we submit a response to this opportunity and we hear in April 2022 from the Police and Crime Commissioner that we've been selected to undertake the independent review.

So that's what I'm here to talk about today, that independent review, or at least aspects of it. Now, before I do, I want to emphasise two things. First of all, that this was an independent review, which means nothing that was contained in the report that we produced as a result of it or anything I say tonight in fact, necessarily reflects the view of the Police and Crime Commissioner. It's an independent review, so what you're hearing or what you read is our views as independent reviewers. The thing I want to emphasise is there actually is a report online that you could go to and read if you wanted to. Like most people, probably, I express myself better on paper. You've got more time to think about what you want to say and you’re not in the white heat and glare of a public lecture with people staring at you. So, if there's anything I say tonight that you think that was unclear or you want more information about it, then you could go online and read the report, the link to which is there at the end. I’d wager good money that you'll find what I said expressed more cogently and clearly and eloquently there than I could possibly manage tonight. So, there we go, that's what we're here to do and that's who I am.

So, I want to set the broad context first for people. The first thing to say is that having been more or less banned in Scotland in 2002, hunt Fox hunting with hounds was banned in England and Wales by the Hunting Act of 2004, which actually came into force in 2005. From that day onwards, it was illegal to go out and hunt foxes with a pack of pack of hounds as used to be the tradition in various parts of England and Wales for many centuries, but you’ve still seen on the video, haven't you that it arouses quite a bit of passion. People get very passionate about this issue. Why are some people so passionate about Fox hunting? And why are some people so passionate about not allowing fox hunting? Why do some people engage in hunting when there's so many other things that you could be doing with your time? Why do some people get so passionate about protecting foxes when there are so many other indignities, I suppose, inflicted on animals around the world and on human beings for that matter? Well, I think it's because fox hunting speaks to a quite a number of political, social and ideological themes which means that the whole practice acts as a bit of a lightning rod for quite a number of concerns.

So, what are the themes that fox hunting speaks to that gives rise to so much passion? Well, I think the first theme is wealth, power and privilege, whatever word would some that up. In some people's eyes, fox hunting is a sport. Now, if we go with that for a second, it's definitely a sport that to fully participate in you've got to have access to horses and hounds and land on which to undertake this activity. The access to the kind of resources that just most of us don't have. Now, subscription models have made hunting more accessible than it once was but I think most people would probably still consider the activity a preserve of the wealthy, privileged and maybe even something that has aristocratic roots.

Which brings me to the second theme, the hunting speaks to, which is the issue of identity. So, in many accounts of fox hunting, it's elevated well above the status of just being a sport or a pastime. It's elevated to the status of being something that is performative, of a certain cultural rural, national identity. Now, this argument was rejected, by the way, in the European Court of Human Rights in 2008, but supporters of fox hunting would say that criminalising the activity suppresses that that rural, cultural and national identity and denies them the right to freedom of expression and family life. That's the argument.

I think the third theme that Fox hunting speaks to, and which gives rise to passion is politics, which is quite apposite at the moment, so politics. When the Fox hunting ban was introduced in 2004, all but six, I think, of the 137 conservative MPs at the time voted against the ban. All but three of the 321 Labour MPs voted for the ban. So, at least back then, whether you were against or for the ban mapped pretty well on to political sympathies, which, as we saw last night, probably already arouses enough passion and fervour as it is. But in addition to that, most of the MPs that voted against the ban represented rural constituencies. Most of the MPs that voted for the ban represented urban constituencies. So, the whole issue of Fox hunting has been tied into the broader debate recently about an urban rural divide and the question of whether, you know, whether the left leaning liberal urban elite are imposing their values on a more conservative, traditional rural population whose needs and culture they don't understand. I think we've seen that played out recently in Wales recently with the reaction to the farm subsidy over the last month in Wales.

The last theme, I think, which makes this such a passionate area for many people is it speaks to the issue of what human beings’ relationship should be with animals and whether we shouldn't be striving for a different relationship than we currently have, and it speaks to the issue whether we should be using animals for entertainment or sport or even for our sustenance needs.

So, a little bit more immediate context. Around about the time the ban was introduced, there was about 200 hunting groups or so in England and Wales and hunting groups usually meet two or three times a week during the hunting season, which runs roughly from October to March each year. The scenes I showed you on the video there do play out fairly regularly across England and Wales at a number of hunt gatherings, so it's not that unusual to see scenes like that. But you might be sat there thinking, especially if you've come, you know, because this looks interesting as opposed to you know anything about it, or you've come god bless you because you're my friends and you wanted a friendly face and thank you very much, you might be wondering ‘why on earth do we see those kinds of scenes, it's banned, what's the issue’?

Well, if we go into the detail of it, the issue is that in response to the ban on fox hunting being introduced, hunting groups announced that their intention was to amend their practices to stay within the law by engaging in simulated forms of hunting known as drag hunting or trail hunting. Now, there's a lot of variability here but if I can just put it succinctly, in drag hunting the riders and the hounds follow a scent, usually an aniseed based one that's been dragged across the countryside and this will be along a route that is usually well known to everybody that is involved in the hunt to the riders, the followers and the landowners across whose land the hunts may cross. So it has a certain order and predictability about the whole thing. Trail hunting, on the other hand, bears more of the hallmarks of traditional fox hunting. So, in trail hunting, riders and hounds will also follow a scent that's been dragged across the countryside, but usually on a route that is not shared with anybody in advance and which is fashioned to resemble the course a fox might take if it was trying to elude a hunt across different terrains and territory. It will look more random, look less predictable. It will look like a proper fox hunt.

Now, associated with fox hunting when it was legal was the practice of, usually men, called terrier men or country men, following a hunt. Their traditional role in a hunt being to dig out a fox that may have taken to ground during a chase. Now in trail hunting country men and terrier men still do that, but their role in trail hunting is reimagined as being to facilitate the hunt, for example, by opening a gate or clearing up after the hunter has pass through. Also associated with fox hunting when it was legal was the practice of cubbing and this involves taking the hounds out in the early morning in order for them to catch the scent of the fox. The reason being that the scent of cubs are especially strong and pungent in the morning and hounds can be trained in that way. Now, in trail hunting that practice is retained through the exercising the dogs in the morning. Now, here's the issue. To some people, trail hunting is a sham. It's a smokescreen that's been deliberately designed to mask, continued Fox hunting. The people you saw on the screen there, many of them will be there because they will not believe that what's going on there is a trail hunt. They think that's something that's said to disguise the facts of fox hunting and in support of that, they will point to the videos and stuff online that seem to show foxes being chased and foxes being killed. People engaged in trail hunting will say to you they're mistaken, it only looks like a fox hunts, it isn't a fox and if any videos exist of foxes being chased that’s just something that can happen when you're involved in a trail hunt. Now, they will say that they continue with almost all of the practices associated with traditional fox hunting, because they expect that in the fullness of time, the ban will be overturned and that's not an unreasonable expectation of theirs, as it turns out, because since the ban was introduced in 2004 I think almost all of the subsequent prime ministers have indicated that they would support the ban being repealed. Although it's never got quite as far as any bills being laid before Parliament.

Heightening suspicions that trail hunting is simply fox hunting in disguise is that in 2020 Mark Hankinson, who was, I think, director of the Masters of Foxhounds Association at the time, was fined in court because the court decided that the video that had appeared online showed him instructing hunts how they can use trail hunting to disguise fox hunting. Key point here for balance, that conviction was overturned but it didn't stop people becoming more suspicious about trail hunting and a number of organisations banning trail hunting on its land, including the National Trust.

So, the situation we have is believing trail hunting to be fox hunting in disguise, people will turn up at hunt gatherings to either protest what's going on, they will turn up to monitor what's going on, take videos for example, I think in the hope that that will have a dampening effect on any illegal behaviour, or they will turn up to sabotage the hunt, for instance by laying false trails to put the hounds off any scent they might be looking for or by using devices I think they might called squawk boxes that emit a noise that could distract a pack of hounds. Where they see evidence of clear illegal behaviour, they will expect the Police to respond and will get angry / upset when they see, or think, the Police are not doing anything and taking action. People involved in trail hunting will not find this attention to their liking at all. They will expect the Police to intervene, to allow them to continue in what they say is legal behaviour and where they see that trail hunting being obstructed or behaviour which makes them concerned, bear in mind they’re on horseback, they will expect the police to react to allow them not only to continue what they're doing but to continue what they're doing in safety. And therein lies the tension and the potential for conflict.

So, it's a very passionate area as you've seen on the video. People feel very strongly on both sides, so to make sure the review was independent I thought it was very necessary to get a team involved in the review that could represent all sides in the debate. This is the team that did the independent review. You’ve got my ugly mug in the in the middle there again, but on the right, we have Andy Jones, who is here today, over there and Andy Jones is a lecturer in the Professional Policing department at the university with 30 years’ experience of working in North Wales Police, has been with us however for five years now. So, he's fully recovered by this point. Lots of experience and very, you know, made a huge contribution on all levels of the review but especially in terms of our engagement with the police and our deep dive into the police database to assess cases. On the left-hand side is Dr Caro Gordon, she's not with us anymore, nothing’s happened to her, she's gone abroad to live in Spain. At the time, she was a lecturer in Criminology here at the university and would have described herself as concerned about animal rights. She was a vegan, still is, and it was only when I was preparing this, I realised I was talking about her as if she was dead. She was a vegan and I think also at the time, Chair of the Ethics Committee for the Vegan Society. So, an interesting perspective she could bring on the whole I think, as well as brokering contact with people in various groups. Now, whenever I talk about Caro and her vegan and kind of animal rights sympathies, people often then say to me ‘ah but where did you stand on this then, what were you representing’? and my answer to that is normally well it doesn't really matter, because this this review wasn't about whether Fox hunting should be banned. It's already banned and this review wasn't about whether is trail hunting really fox hunting in disguise, that’s not what we were asked to do. What this review was about is whether North Wales Police are enforcing the ban on fox hunting with hounds, so what I think about that ban is really irrelevant. But nonetheless, I know it's something people are interested in, they certainly were, so my view on what I usually say to people is if you watch a movie these days there will usually be a bit at the end where they say, no animals were harmed in the making of this movie and that's because, as a general rule, people don't like to think about animals being harmed in any way and I guess that fits me. I don't like to think of that, but I'm not especially exercised by the issue of fox hunting, if I'm honest with you, one way or another. I'm passionate about a number of things, but it just doesn't happen to be one of them. So, my position is really largely objective I would have thought, on all of these issues, and the focus is about how well the Police were enforcing legislation and meeting national standards and I've been doing that for 20 years in terms of youth justice, probation and prison practice. That’s the point here. I think some people did regret really that I couldn't have more passion for the subject, but I wonder whether a partisan approach would have actually been any good in this research or this review and I suspect maybe not, but there we go.

I want to talk then about what we did. I said we’d talk about what we did and what we found. We put in a bid to the Police and Crime Commissioner to do this review and this is what we said we do and I assume it was okay because we won the tender. So, we said we do a survey, distribute a survey, we’d conduct interviews and we’d do critical incident analysis and I just explained to you what those are being mindful this is a public lecture and nobody wants to hear me bang on about ontology and methodology so I'll just tell you what we did. So, first of all we did a survey, we distributed the survey across the North Wales area and the rationale behind the survey was to give as many people as possible the opportunity to contribute to the review. We designed the survey and it had about 30 questions in it that asked people to rate their experiences at hunt gatherings with the police, to then give an account of those experiences and then to say something about how satisfied they were or not with the police response. We distributed across North Wales using the Police and Crime Commissioners website, the police, the rural crime team. I think it appeared in the Daily Post several times, we sent it to hunt groups, to anti hunt groups. So, by the end, I was fairly satisfied that anybody who was involved in this area would have had an opportunity to fill in the survey, even if they chose not to.

In terms of the responses that we got, we asked people at the beginning to kind of declare themselves and we got 117 responses. I say 117, this is after we we've done what's called data cleansing. I got a number of responses from people identify themselves as ‘Basil Brush’ and ‘upset at the behaviour they were subjected to every week from their handler’, I'm sure you know where they were going with that. Every survey gets those kinds of responses. So, after data cleansing, this this is the alignment in terms of people's sympathies, as it were.

* 22% of respondents were involved in hunting.
* 36 or 30% were involved in anti-hunting campaigns.
* 41% were affected by fox hunting in North Wales
* A small percentage thought that none of those categories described themselves so they chose ‘other’.

So that was the survey and we distributed that quite widely. The next part of the methodology was interviews. We conducted 33 interviews in the end. It was relatively straightforward to speak to the police staff we wanted to speak to because this research was commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner, so they're not going to say no, are they? They were quite happy to be involved. We got less traction with people involved in hunting, only four people we interviewed and this was because two months into the review, the Countryside Alliance publicly withdrew support for what we were doing. They sent a letter to the Police and Crime Commissioner, so every newspaper in the land, I think the phrase was ‘fundamentally flawed’ for what we were doing. There's no such thing as bad publicity for an academic, by the way. The reasons they considered what we were doing flawed, if I remember rightly, was because the survey was open to people outside of North Wales, anybody could fill the survey in and we'd got the law wrong in an easy read version of the survey. I would have been quite happy to discuss this with the Countryside Alliance, but they didn't seem to want to engage with me on that issue, so I'll do that now. The survey was open to people outside North Wales, quite simply because hunting, people involved in hunting and people protesting against it, cross borders so narrowing to people just in North Wales made no sense at all. All public services are liable to a bad actor wanting to skew the data but this wasn't a large-scale quantitative research where we were going to be drawing generalisations. It was just thematic and indicative, but we also had countermeasures, as most national surveys or population wide surveys did. I'm not going to reveal what they were; I'd have been quite happy to discuss that as well but we didn't get that far. We'd commissioned a specialist group to design an easy read version of the survey. Just something that we that we do so that people with literacy difficulties could also contribute to the research if they wanted to and in that we'd kind of simplified some of the language and I won't bore you with details, but that was the other objection. None of them were very valid in my view but that's where we ended up.

Fortunately, at least four people didn't agree with that and did agree to be interviewed. I don't know whether the Countryside Alliance changed their mind or not but a couple of months later, we did receive a dossier from hunting groups in North Wales containing videos and statements of relevance to our research aims and objectives, so we did get some traction from them later on. It's relatively easy to interview people who describe themselves as saboteurs or monitors, good range of interviewees there. We interviewed five people affected by hunting, and we had five ‘others’ as well and I've struggled with this ‘others’ because this sounds a bit like Deep Throat out of Watergate, but in essence they were individuals who were really very well placed to comment on the issues that we were exploring, but whose status and role was such that if I was to say anything about them, it would be very clear who it was so they have to be others and that's the that's all I can say about that. We interviewed 33 people and that seemed like a good range of people to us and we could identify many gaps after that.

The other thing in our methodology that we did; that’s good, I'm on time then, good. That’s 15 minutes by the way, if this is really not your thing, there's only 15 minutes to go and you can comfort yourself that I'm really good at timekeeping. Moreover, if you are bored by now and this isn't your thing, well, at least we're both of the same mind, we both just want to get this over as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

Anyway, so the last bit of the methodology was the critical incident analysis. This was quite an involved affair, but essentially involved Andy and I negotiating access with North Wales Police to their computer systems, Icad and R and S and making a deep dive to look at how they had dealt with incidents connected with illegal hunting or reports of illegal hunting and instances at hunt gatherings between January 2018 and the start of lockdown in 2020. Identifying cases was not easy and I'm sure you don't want to know the detail, but we used the keyword search ‘Fox’ and ‘Hunt's’ and put all the names of the of the hunts into the search engine. We identified 77 incidents at the end and what Andy and I did was using my in my inspectorial history and Andrew’s Police history, we designed a proforma where we could assess what we saw in relation to recording, responding and investigating incidents that have been reported. Our benchmarks, well, there were many benchmarks, but these are just some of them. National standards for incident recording, national crime recording standards, investigation standards and good practice guidance in relation to policing, hunt gatherings and protests good practice guides.

So that's what we did. What did we find? Here’s what we found. First, we found there were a number of legal challenges associated with enforcing the ban on fox hunting with hounds and policing incidents connected to hunting. Associated in the first instance with the way the legislation was drafted and the way subsequent case law has been developed. This is a very involved area law and very complicated, it's beyond the, unless you all want to stay until 9 o’clock, it's beyond the remit of this short lecture to go into every single nuance. But, in order to secure a conviction for illegal hunting, it is necessary to prove beyond a reasonable doubt, that the person that you're accusing was not engaged in trail hunting. And / or that they weren't engaged in one of the, not hunting under one of the exemptions provided by the Hunting Act. So, it's still legal, for example, to go out with two hounds and to use them to flush a dog to guns. You can, that's still legal with two dogs. The other thing you have to prove beyond reasonable doubt is that although the fox was chased and/ or a fox was killed, that that was deliberate. That that chase and that killing was intended to happen. Put another way, that it wasn't just an accident that happened during the course of a trail hunt, you have to prove that beyond reasonable doubt. The last thing you have to prove beyond a reasonable doubt is that you've got the right individual in front of the court and that may not be as easy as it may look because as you can see, everybody dresses the same. Being part of a hunt is not illegal. You have to have the person who's responsible for the hunt and responsible for the hounds, which isn't always as straightforward as it seems.

Now, in terms of incidents associated with hunting, the legislation is a bit more clear here and the kind of things we're talking about which is threatening behaviour, obstruction, breach of the peace, they represent more with the bread and butter stuff that Police are involved in. The law there is much more clearly developed or understood at least by police officers, but it's not as if that area doesn't come with its complexities as well. You may consider from the video that you saw that there's a there's a bit of a fine line, isn't there, between passionate protesting and assertive protesting and aggressive, problematic protesting. There's a fine line to judge which side people are on as far as that's concerned. Perhaps the thing that causes most consternation or appears to be, is trespass. Be that by hunting groups or protesters. Well, trespass isn't a criminal offence in this country, it's dealt with by way of the civil courts, normally by way of arrest and prosecution. So that's a that's a difficult one for the Police as well. Now if somebody does lay themselves open to a charge of aggravated trespass, if they go onto private land with the intention of stopping someone from engaging in a lawful activity, but even stopping protesters, if that's your aim that way, is problematic because the law is about lawful activity and I guess you'd have to prove beyond reasonable doubt that what was going on, trail hunting, was lawful as opposed to fox hunting. So, lots of lots of legal challenges to be overcome to secure convictions related to illegal hunting and incidents associated with hunting.

The next thing I want to talk about is the evidential challenges associated with activity in this area. These, if you think about it, are fairly straightforward and obvious, I would think. Hunting or protesting, whatever, usually takes place on private land and police don't have automatic rights of access to this land without permission. So, again, the complexities that come with that, the Police can't just put anybody they want under surveillance on a whim and even if they could, hunting is a fast-paced activity over large areas and they rarely have the capacity to keep up. Now, some people say well use drones and helicopters, well there are wild animals here, people on horseback, they can be spooked very easily so things are never quite as straightforward as it seems.

The other thing is, if you like it or not, the witnesses to any incident are often partisan in some way or another so their evidence is reasonably easily discredited at court. Video evidence, which is often put forward, is usually nowhere near as credible and sufficient as people think that that it is. So as a review team, when we were doing this review, we were sent quite a number of videos of either purporting to show clear evidence of illegal fox hunting or purporting to show clear evidence of criminal behaviour during the hunt, but as a review team, we didn't consider any of it conclusive beyond reasonable doubt in anyway. That was because mostly the videos were poor quality or heavily edited, or they didn't have a date stamp on it and some of these things have to be charged within six months. There were better pieces of evidence that we were sent which we thought were interesting and could have formed the basis for a prosecution but for that to happen, normally, they'd have to see the original copy of it, it’d have to be subjected to forensic analysis. You've all seen the deep fakes of Keir Starmer on telly. So normally, the original recording equipment has to be handed in as well and what we found is that people were rarely willing to do that, to hand in their iPhones, for instance, for further analysis. So, there was an awful lot of evidential challenges in this area as well.

Now, at the time when we were doing our review, North Wales Police’s response to the challenges was enshrined in something called Operation Yarder. This had three main aims. It was to facilitate protest, to manage disorder at protests and to prevent and deter illegal hunting. Now as a review team, we looked at this operation and the orders associated with it and we considered actually it was reasonably compliant with good practice and national standards in relation to what should be going on. We thought that the details in relation to how the operation would help meet the third aim, which is to prevent and deter illegal hunting was much less well developed than it was in relation to the other two aims. So, there was work for North Wales Police to do in terms of making sure that the operational details were such that it could be satisfied that it was aiming to address all three aims.

So, moving on. I just want to say; how am I doing? So, we asked people how satisfied, dissatisfied they were with the Police performance and it's no surprise really to find that most people were dissatisfied. That's what happens when you do a survey. It's not that interesting that people were dissatisfied. What's interesting, is the way that data was stratified. If you were involved in hunting, you were reasonably happy with the Police performance. If you're a protester, you were usually unhappy with the Police performance, dissatisfied, so broke down in that way. Why were people dissatisfied with the police performance? Well, it usually broke down to three reasons: the Police were not acting on evidence of illegal hunting, well they weren't because it was rarely convincing and compelling and there are real challenges here. The RSPCA took a private prosecution in 2012 against a hunt, they secured a conviction but it cost £330,000 to get that conviction. There are real issues about pursuing a case unless the evidence is really strong. People were also dissatisfied because Police were using their powers more frequently and readily against anti-hunt campaigners and the Police themselves recognised that they probably were, because the law and legislation in relation to those areas of obstruction, breach the peace, were often clearer and their behaviours were more visible and immediate and seemed to be require at times an urgent response for safety reasons.

It's fair to say as well, that the people we spoke to were of the view that the Police were giving protesters more attention than people involved in hunting, for example, if there was a car going to a hunt full of protesters, it would be much more likely to be stopped than would be a terrier man on a quad bike riding furiously. Now, the Police obviously were very keen to tell us that they approached every case objectively, but it was a struggle really to get them to clarify how they ensured that was. So, given the stereotypes that exist around anti-hunt groups and given what I'm going to tell you in, in a few seconds. The third thing is the North Wales Police having over-friendly relations with the individuals involved in hunting. Some people took this further to suggest there was a conspiracy. What we found was, yes, the North Wales Police did have a better relationship with individuals involved in hunting, this was for two reasons. They engaged with these people routinely because they were involved with the communities on other issues other than fox hunting, so they had more familiarity with these people. But in addition, lines of communication between the Police and anti-hunt groups were not as clear and regular as they once were and as they needed to be. So again, more work for the Police to do in terms of building relations and ties with the anti-hunt groups, because in the absence of those ties, conspiracy theories could easily arise and problems could arise. For instance, hunting groups knew all about Operation Yarder and its detail. Anti-hunt groups knew nothing about it and so when they saw the Police gatherings talking to people involved in hunting about Yarder, they felt left out. Naturally, you put two and two together and think there's something going on here when there wasn’t.

The last thing in terms of findings, I think. So, in terms of our deep dive into cases, we looked at lots of cases that involved the Courts, the Police and we genuinely found that the Police responded in line with national standards to incidents reported to them. They probably responded far better than most people reported incidents would ever know because an idiosyncrasy of the criminal justice system is, if you're a victim of crime and you report a crime, there are expectations of the Police in terms of keeping you informed about what happened. However, if you're reporting a crime against, you know, an illegal hunt or you're reporting something you've witnessed, there is no obligation on the Police to let you know. It would very much seem to you as if you reported something and nothing had happened, but actually, what we found is that usually something did happen. There was some activity around the report of an incident and often that went above what we would expect. And so, for example, if somebody phoned in, said, there's four people on horseback in my field, a car might be dispatched and we wouldn't expect that because it's not a crime to be on horseback in someone's field, so a risk averse approach seemed to dominate. We also found that in too many cases, there wasn't enough of what we would call an investigative mindset. So, at the stage where an incident might be reported, the right questions weren't being asked, the right details weren't being sought that could form the basis for future investigation. Where those details had been sought, it wasn't always the case that every line of inquiry that was reasonable had then been closed down and the reasons for the case being shut down was recorded on the computer systems. So, work to be done there for the Police in terms of adopting an investigative mindset.

In summary, what we found was that North Wales Police were performing in line, usually with national standards, but with areas for improvement. We certainly didn't feel that there was a, you know, North Wales Police were performing any worse or better than any other Police service area, certainly that was never suggested to us by anybody we spoke to. We felt that the practice could move on because up to that point, there had not been a single conviction in North Wales of anybody for the illegal hunting, for example, where there had been in other areas. Now that could just be one of those things, but it did occur to us that perhaps the investigative mindset wasn't quite where it needed to be so we made some recommendations. They're not all here there's about 12 of them but the ones relevant to what I've talked about tonight is:

* we suggested that JCC, that's the control room people that take the calls, need to be further briefed on taking calls relating to hunting or instances of illegal fox hunting should be approached with an investigative mindset.
* There should be better supervision of cases and incidents of this nature, so that the supervisors could satisfy themselves that all possible reasonable lines of enquiries had been followed.
* We certainly recommended that the Police could more be much more diligent in terms of recording decision making in relation to these cases.
* North Wales Police should re-establish contact and have constructive conversations with hunt and anti-hunt groups.

Did I say I was good on time? Just the last couple of things then. Have things moved on? Well, our report was published in January 2023 and that coincided with the first conviction in North Wales of somebody for illegally hunting with hounds. Like every organisation, I've been an inspector for 20 years and I always find when I go and inspect the people I'm inspecting, they’ve already identified the problems themselves and have started to do something about it. There's nothing wrong with that, that's a sign of a mature organisation that, you know, you don't wait to be told what’s wrong. If you know something's coming, you have a look yourself and you go ‘yeah, we'll do that’, so North Wales Police had already moved on by the time that we came to look at what they were doing and this prosecution I think maybe reflects that as much as much as our independent view, but I like to think maybe we made a contribution along the way.

So there we go. That's it.