

What the election should really be about?

A general election is the best chance most pressure groups get to make a real impact on government policy. Here is how six leading lobbies plan to make sure their cause is being debated ahead of an expected Spring poll.

We've called for the state pension to be increased from £79.60 to the pensioner credit guarantee level of £105.45. That's what we're calling for. Many pensioners are disadvantaged by the current system. If we've got one in five pensioners below the poverty line, we've got to make it more generous or have these people living in poverty.

We've drawn up a pensioners' manifesto. This will be sent to each of the candidates in the 659 constituencies. They will be asked which of the top five issues, including the pension issue, they would support. Once we've got their responses we will publish the results within the constituencies and nationally as well. It's our way of putting the politicians on notice. We are trying to get across the fact that there are 11m voters over 60 in the country, they are more likely to vote than other sections of society and thirdly they are true swing voters. Before 1997 most pensioners voted Conservative. In 1997 and 2001 they voted Labour. But there is no guarantee they will vote for a Labour government this time around. They cannot take that vote for granted.

Pensions generally will certainly be a big election issue even though the government has postponed the publication of Adair Turner's full report into the issue. He said the UK had one of the least generous pensions systems in the developed world.

That the government takes seriously the impact of aviation on the environment.

We haven't worked out specific plans but I imagine we will lobby political parties and incumbent MPs. Various local groups will do that in their particular areas and we will provide a national briefing. We don't have any large demonstrations planned but they can't be ruled out.

It is hard to say whether we will be successful. We have got the issue in the public consciousness to an extent, but it is difficult to say whether an election will raise its importance in the public mind or whether it will be pushed out by big issues like Iraq.

Repealing the Hunting Bill.

We are challenging the use of the Parliament Act 1949 in a High Court action. We are hoping to hear in the New Year. Whichever way the court rules the other side will appeal so we expect it to fall plumb in electioneering time. When the ban comes into force on 18 February we will be going to the European Court because no compensation is being paid. So there's a lot of legal territory to go. We are trying to engage with the ministers by demonstrating and talking. Whatever intelligence we get we will try to turn up and speak to whoever it is. (Rural affairs minister) Alun Michael has avoided us and cancelled engagements so that makes it difficult. It is not intimidatory - on the whole it is groups of angry housewives. Of course there is an element of shouting because people are angry but there is no violence because that does not achieve anything.

It will fall plumb in the run up to the most important general election Tony Blair will ever face. It's exactly what the prime minister did not want. He wanted the issue off the table until after the election.

People using live animals as targets for sport both here and abroad. The reason for including abroad is because of trophy hunting. It is another sort of form of shooting for sport. The principle is

the same whether it's a tiger or a pheasant.

We will widely publicise what's happening in relation to trophy hunting. We will publicise the darker aspects of the target animal industry the UK. We will seek to get pledges from individual MPs and would-be MPs saying that they are against the use of animals as targets for sports. We would like the support of political parties but I think a general election is very much to do with pledges MPs make to their electors. With hunting we had many MPs who were happy to say they were against it.

I think what we will get is a very real climbing up the agenda. Whether or not we will get a ban I am not sure. But it will mobilise public opinion. Everything we do will reduce animal suffering and in time that will lead to a ban.

The issue that we think is the most important for this election is choice. The language of consumerism is very commonplace in government and across the political spectrum. Choice as an ideology is beginning to be the privatisation of this decade. It's become an issue in itself but what's really missing from the debate is the consumer's choice in that. Choice is not choice at all if all you have to choose from is two failing schools. We have seen so many pensions mis-selling scandals and in the pensions industry there's a maximum of choice but a minimum quality in that. We want choice on the consumer's terms - that means clear and accessible information to operate that choice.

Firstly, we have our website. It features our campaigns and changes every day. Secondly through our 700,000 members who communicate with us. Thirdly through the media and also what we will be doing is holding a pre-election conference. We will invite the opinion formers, MPs, journalists and others. The idea is that we open up communications between members of the public and the politicians.

I think we will be successful. It's very much the language being used by the main political parties. Politicians on all sides are very sensitive to this issue they want to be seen to be responding to this issue.

Fuel duty is a large part of operational costs for road haulage workers. We have been hearing about this proposed increase of 1.92p per litre that Gordon Brown has been postponing and postponing. Tuppence does not sound like a great deal but every year if you operate one vehicle that's an increase of about £750. If you're running 10 vehicles it's obviously 10 times that.

If fuel duty does rise we will be absolutely horrified. There will be a huge effect throughout the industry and I would not be surprised if you see widespread demonstrations. What it will mean is there will be a number of firms going out of business.

We will continue to do what we have always done we keep the issue in the trade press. Regrettably it's one of those stories that it is getting harder to get into the national press. Whatever we do, the public don't like lorries - they see us as a complaining minority. But they don't realise that when you see a car on the road it is probably going to work, when you see a lorry it's already at work.