

Press Statement – for immediate release
From Naturist Action Group ('NAG')

<http://naturistactiongroup.org/>

Steve Gough, 'The Naked Rambler' - a political prisoner in Scotland.

On 23rd August 2012, Steve Gough will once again come to trial in a Scottish court charged with causing 'alarm' to a three-year old child by stopping to eat his lunch in a public park while naked. Gough had been free for just two days, released after six years of segregated confinement in various Scottish prisons, and was attempting to walk back to England.

His incarceration started with an arrest while walking through Scotland, something which thousands of people do unnoticed by the police. What made them notice Gough was that he chose to wear no clothes, which is a part of his preferred lifestyle and for which he has campaigned for under the banner: *Freedom to be Yourself*. Gough has walked naked from Land's End to John O'Groats twice, accompanied by a series of companions. On the first walk, being unusual at the time, he naturally attracted media attention and in the process Gough gained the nickname 'The Naked Rambler'. In England, they were mostly allowed to go peacefully on their way, as they did not pose a threat. However in Scotland the police decided that Gough may 'alarm' someone, and arrested him. Since then Gough has refused to dress for court appearances or on release, with the result that he was immediately re-arrested every time he left prison. This 6 year cycle of police & court intransigence was broken in July 2012 when Gough was released but not re-arrested. However two days later in Townhill, Dunfermline, the police decided to start the cycle of imprisonment and trials anew.

NAG deplores the treatment meted out to Steve Gough over an extended period by the Scottish police and judiciary, it amounting to unusual and disproportionate punishment. NAG believes that Gough has been the victim of institutional prudery that seeks to 'protect' people from seeing a naked human body, without any evidence that such protection is desired or necessary. In any group of people you will find someone who finds the appearance of another offensive. However, in a civilised society we tolerate differences of appearance and expression, because they do not do any actual harm.

NAG agrees with Lord Justice Sedley in DPP REDMOND-BATE v. DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS [1999] EWHC Admin 732 (23rd July, 1999):

"Free speech includes not only the inoffensive but the irritating, the contentious, the eccentric, the heretical, the unwelcome and the provocative provided it does not tend to provoke violence. Freedom only to speak inoffensively is not worth having."

Freedom of expression does not only relate to the freedom of speech, but to all aspects of life. The choice of what to wear, or not to wear, is a genuine part of human expression, otherwise why does the fashion industry exist? Naturists believe that choosing to be naked when they want to be is an important part of the way they express themselves. Freedom Of Expression is one of the protected rights at the heart of The Human Rights Act 1998, and NAG believes that by their treatment of Gough, the Scottish Authorities have been in breach of this for at least six years. In effect, a small minority of prudish authoritarian officials are imposing their will on society and making de-facto law, which is contrary to legislation passed in parliament, and to majority public opinion.

Gough is not alone in espousing nudity as part of a lifestyle. According to a recent independent poll carried out on behalf of British Naturism, about 3.6 million people in Britain enjoy naked leisure from time to time, and only a vanishingly small minority even finds the sight of others' naked offensive. There is no evidence that the sight of innocent nudity affects children adversely; quite the opposite, it assists in the development of healthy attitudes towards body image.

Whether or not you agree with Gough's approach, ask yourself this, would *you* wish to be treated in a similar fashion for something dear to you that harmed no one? At best he is a symbol of our right to freedom, at worst he is just a peaceful and patient eccentric. Even if you side with the courts in principle, is it proportionate to punish a victimless incident with six years in jail? Compare that with the sentences served by people who commit real crimes! Is this a sensible use of public money? The whole exercise is estimated to have cost the taxpayer over £300,000 – and for what? More importantly, it has cost Steve Gough six years of his life.

This madness must end. **NAG calls on the Scottish Judiciary to free Steve Gough, and for the Scottish Police to stop this institutional harassment.**

[ENDS]

Notes to editors:

- Naturist Action Group is a UK-based not-for-profit 'think tank' and campaigning organisation, working for the greater acceptance of naturism in British society. Further information about NAG can be found at <http://naturistactiongroup.org/>
- Naturist Action Group contact: Duncan Heenan duncan.heenan@naturistactiongroup.co.uk or 0844 357 5196 + 1
- This Press Statement is for immediate release and may be quoted in whole or in part, but may not be altered in quotation.