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Wales

Non-native Species Policy Team
Biodiversity Programme
Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs,
and
Nature Conservation
Welsh Government

20th September 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

Control of the European beaver (*Castor fiber*)

Section 14(a) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (WCA) refers to the release into the wild of any animal which is not ordinarily resident in Great Britain. Beavers are undergoing a trial release in Knapdale, Scotland (fewer than 20 animals) and there are about 150 living around the Tay area as well as smaller numbers in England. Their status in the UK is therefore changing. Natural Resources Wales, Natural England (NE) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) therefore support the proposal to list the European beaver on Schedule 9 of the WCA as a means of clarifying the law in terms of this changing status and to help improve the management of any future beaver releases through the requirement of a licence. However, Natural Resources Wales, NE and JNCC found the voluntary code of conduct unclear and would like to see this improved.

Regulatory controls

Natural Resources Wales considers that the proposed addition of beavers to Schedule 9 will send a clear message about the importance of properly developed reintroduction proposals. It is likely that organisations, such as NGOs, considering a beaver reintroduction would consider the IUCN guidelines and consult with Natural Resources Wales on their proposals whether or not a licence is required. However, the inclusion of European beaver on Schedule 9 will ensure that there is a proper regulated process in place for the consideration of such proposals.

This proposal will not provide complete control over the release of beavers as individuals that are inclined to release beavers surreptitiously may not be deterred by the addition of beaver to Schedule 9. However, the continuation of this legal safeguard will act as a deterrent to many and will provide the

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opportunity for prosecution if there is sufficient evidence of an illegal release.

On the whole we support the conclusions of the impact assessment. It would have been useful for the 'Costs and Benefits' assessment to also consider the consequences to other native species and habitats from the release of a beaver family into inappropriate habitat.

The Costs and Benefits assessment notes that the legislation could be used to ensure compliance with the IUCN reintroduction guidelines, including using founder animals most closely related to the extinct British population. Whilst genetic origin would to be a consideration in any reintroduction proposal, the genetic health of the founder animals will also need to be taken into account. The Halley (2011) paper referred to in the Impact Assessment also states that there is evidence of a loss of genetic diversity in some beaver populations as a result of inbreeding depression.

We do not envisage any significant business impact for Natural Resources Wales from the inclusion of beaver on Schedule 9. Members of staff are already in contact with the organisation developing beaver reintroduction proposals in Wales and the licensing role would be a continuation of the current situation.

Code of practice

Natural Resources Wales recognises the importance of ensuring, as far as is possible, that *Echinococcus multilocularis* is not introduced to the UK from imported beavers. The inclusion of beavers on Schedule 9 would go some way towards managing that risk but does not provide a mechanism by which to manage the risk from beavers being imported for use in enclosures. We therefore support the development of the code of practice

In our view, the code of practice could benefit from being a little clearer. For example, the code asks for those holding beavers '*to confirm that only animals that were sourced from areas considered to be free from EM ... are in future released ...*'. It doesn't state to whom or how this should be confirmed. Further, it would also be helpful if the code of practice made reference to ensuring that enclosures are secure so that beavers can not escape and provided pointers to available guidance on fencing specifications.

For any further information regarding the above please contact Jo Hughes or Liz Halliwell at jo.hughes@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk or liz.halliwell@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

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Yours sincerely

Ceri Davies
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Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredol Gwybodaeth, Strategaeth a Chynllunio

Natural Resources Wales brings together the work of the Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales, as well as some functions of Welsh Government. Our purpose is to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, used and enhanced, now and in the future.

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