

PE1815/A

Scottish Government submission of 19 August 2020

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1815: TRANSLOCATE PROTECTED BEAVERS TO REDUCE LICENSED KILLING

I refer to your email of 16 July 2020 regarding Petition PE1815 - Translocate Protected Beavers to Reduce Licensed Killing, lodged by Steve Micklewright, seeking the Scottish Government's views on the action called for in the petition, namely calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to initiate a programme to translocate protected beavers to suitable habitat outside existing beaver range, to minimise the need to kill animals adversely impacting arable farmland.

As you may be aware, Roseanna Cunningham, Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, announced on 24 November 2016 that the European beaver populations in Knapdale, Argyll and in the Tay and Earn catchments can remain in Scotland, and that their range can expand naturally. Beavers became a European Protected Species on 1 May 2019.

Throughout this process the Scottish Government has been clear that any further illegal releases or escapes would not be tolerated as we have seen the problems such releases can cause. We have also stated that while natural range expansion is expected and acceptable, we are not minded to support further human-assisted range expansion while we develop our understanding of techniques for management of beavers. Reassuring landowners and other stakeholders that their economic interests will not be seriously adversely affected is an important element of species reintroductions policy.

Lethal control is one element of beaver management. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) can issue licences that permit the killing of beavers by trained individuals where beavers are causing serious damage and there is no other satisfactory solution. The decision to issue licences for lethal control of beavers in such situations is not taken lightly and is only used as a last resort.

SNH published a report on 28 May 2020 on the first year of beaver licensing and it is available on their website at <https://www.nature.scot/snh-beaver-licensing-summary-1st-may-31stdecember-2019>.

While lethal control will continue to be an important element of beaver management, it is a last resort and we support the development of additional techniques that will allow the use of lethal control to be reduced. We are therefore supporting SNH to make more use of trapping and translocation of beavers from high to low conflict areas within existing beaver territorial ranges. We are not at this stage supporting the translocation of beavers into entirely new areas. The issue of consultation and obtaining local stakeholder agreement remains important. We would note in this context that even where an individual landowner supports the release of beavers, we know the species is highly mobile and so potential impacts need to be assessed over a wider area than a single property.

It should also be noted that while translocations may initially be seen as an attractive alternative to lethal control, live-trapping is not always possible on every site for a number of reasons including family structure, the topography and general nature of the site and how beavers use it, as well as the behaviour of the individual animals and requirements of receptor sites.

Translocation can have significant welfare implications associated with capture, transport and following release. The process requires expert input, specialist equipment and facilities as well as significant time and effort and has to be carefully planned.

SNH will continue to work with farmers to trial new and innovative measures for reducing the impacts of beavers and we hope to see less need for control measures in the coming years. There is increasing recognition of the benefits that beavers can bring in terms of biodiversity, flood mitigation and water quality and working with the Scottish Beaver Forum we hope to explore how delivering these outcomes can be incorporated into future rural support.