

PE1815/B

Petitioner Submission of 10 September 2020.

I refer to the Scottish Government submission of 19/08/20 concerning its opposition to reducing the licensed killing of beavers by translocating them elsewhere.

There are 16,769 signatories to this Scottish Parliamentary petition; more than any other in over 10 years, demonstrating broad public support.

Context

The government response avoids the wider context of the petition.

It does not acknowledge that 20% of the total population of this recently protected and 'Red List' mammal were killed under licence in 2019. This happened when there is demand for beavers in England and growing numbers of Scottish landowners would welcome beavers.

While the submission recognises "*the benefits that beavers can bring for biodiversity, flood mitigation and water quality*", it does not acknowledge that the 87 beavers killed could have made a significant contribution to this in other parts of Scotland.

The killing of beavers is in stark contrast to the 'call to action' of the recent Edinburgh Declaration where the government asks to ~~take bold actions~~¹ and bold actions to bring

Justifications for the current position

The Scottish Government submission focuses on five issues that have led them to conclude that the current situation is acceptable. Our response is presented below.

Developing understanding beaver management techniques

Beavers are one of the most heavily studied mammal species², to suggest otherwise is disingenuous. The government can learn from, and apply, decades of experience of beaver management from the 25 European countries who have successfully reintroduced them.

The NatureScot CEO has stated, "*I have heard it said that if you were to pick an area of Scotland which would be really difficult for beavers in terms of conflict with human activity, Tayside is probably it in terms of the agricultural use of that land.*"³

If beavers were living in less "difficult" river systems, NatureScot would learn more quickly how to manage them for multiple benefits.

¹ Edinburgh Declaration See <https://www.gov.scot/publications/edinburgh-declaration-on-post-2020-biodiversity-framework/pages/call-for-action/>

² For example – M. Gaywood (ed.), Beavers in Scotland, A Report to the Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage, 2015

³ <https://www.thenational.scot/news/18670622.scottish-government-pledges-do-can-fix-beaver-issue/>

Assertion that lethal control is a last resort

The submission states lethal control licences are 'not issued lightly'. However 21 of the 42 licences issued did not involve a site visit,⁴ but were allowed on the basis of land categorisation. Furthermore, 60% of the lethal control licences issued were not used in 2019.⁵

The carcass of a shot young beaver was found on the day after the 'kit dependency period' ended⁶. This, despite the demand in England and the location being ideal for trapping, no attempt was made to do so.

Where trapping and relocation are suitable but have not been attempted, killing cannot be regarded as a 'last resort'.

Local stakeholder agreement needed

The government considers wider stakeholder agreement is required to allow beaver reintroduction to new catchments. Trees for Life has found a willingness by landowners and communities to discuss the possibility of beaver reintroduction⁷.

These building blocks for local stakeholder agreement should be pursued by government so that beavers can be reintroduced to catchments it would take them decades to reach through 'natural expansion'.

Trapping not always possible due to site circumstances

Trapping may not be appropriate in every situation, but it is difficult to accept that all of the 87 beavers shot could not have been trapped. The problem is that trapping has been bypassed as an option because lethal control licences are too easy to obtain.

Welfare concerns

Trapping and translocating of any wild animal carries risks, but beavers have been trapped in Scotland for translocation elsewhere, demonstrating it is possible and routinely successful. It is remarkable that there is only one beaver trapping consultant employed in Scotland, but SNH has trained 139 accredited beaver shooters⁸.

⁴ Answers to Parliamentary Questions given by Cabinet Secretary to for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform dated 2 June 2020

⁵ Nature.Scot Beaver licensing summary 31st May to 31st December 2019 p 3

⁶ The Ferret. 25 August 2020 <https://theferret.scot/probe-beaver-shot-dead-perthshire/>

⁷ <https://treesforlife.org.uk/community-forums-about-beavers-in-strathglass/>

⁸ Answers to Parliamentary Questions given by Cabinet Secretary to for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform dated 16 May 2019

Conclusion

NatureScot's CEO stated they would do "*everything we can*" to resolve the problem of beaver shooting.⁹ The petition indicates there is very significant support for that outcome.

105,000 hectares of "core beaver woodland" exists in Scotland,¹⁰ providing potential habitat for beavers. Allowing the translocation from problematic low-lying agricultural areas could help resolve the problem.

In view of the above and the number of signatories on the petition, we respectfully ask that it is referred to the Parliamentary Environmental, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee.

Yours sincerely

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CEO, Trees for Life

⁹ <https://www.thenational.scot/news/18670622.scottish-government-pledges-do-can-fix-beaver-issue/>

¹⁰ Beavers in Scotland. A report to Scottish Government 2015