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Government announcements on Species Reintroductions

Summary

As part of Nature Week, George Eustace outlined a deluge of policy announcements yesterday (18th May), including launching the governments Peat and Trees action plans (see briefings on NFUonline) to tackle climate change and publishing Defra's "[Reintroductions and other conservation translocations: code and guidance for England](#)". Species reintroductions are referenced in the government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#) and are attracting increased attention. Defra has published the code and guidance document, relevant to England that sets the best practice for applications and delivering species reintroduction projects. The NFU responded to Defra consultation on this last summer. The NFU continues to work closely with Government and monitor all species reintroduction proposals that pose a threat to farming.

Tony Juniper, Natural England (NE) chair also announced that NE would be leading a "species reintroductions taskforce". There are no further details of organisations that will sit on this taskforce at present, though the NFU is keen to engage. Previous engagement with Government suggests farming representatives will be fundamental members of such a taskforce.

Natural England's' Species Reintroduction Taskforce

The update from Tony Juniper yesterday [from Delamere forest](#) outlined how NE intends to lead and provide secretariat to a Species Reintroduction Taskforce, in order to recover lost species as part of the [Nature Recovery Network \(NRN\)](#), which the NFU is a partner of. This reintroduction taskforce will "*bring together experts, landowners and NGOs to share knowledge, assess and prioritise species for reintroduction and to develop partnerships for delivering high quality projects*".

The NFU hopes to get a seat on this taskforce, and previous engagement with NE indicates we will. It is crucial that farmers are adequately represented to ensure that any decisions to introduce species into the wider landscape consider the potential socio-economic impacts and that any farmers and landowners that are affected by the project are adequately compensated.

Species Reintroductions and other conservation Translocations; code and guidance for England

Last summer, Defra consulted the NFU and other stakeholders on the draft version of this code and guidance and the NFU responded in full, which you can [read here](#). There is increasing interest in species reintroductions projects from environmental groups in an attempt to restore the lost species that were once found in the UK, helping to reverse biodiversity declines. The NFU has concerns around any species reintroduction given they are expensive, often unsuccessful and can threaten the many benefits the countryside delivers. However, it is important that we influence and engage to ensure that adequate measures are in place to address the specific concerns we have. To date, the [IUCN guidelines](#) have been used to assess applications by NE, the licensing body however the content is international and is not

always relevant to the UK. Scotland drafted their own code in 2014 and this England specific code has been drafted largely based on the [Scottish code](#).

The NFU major concerns are outlined below.

Consultation process

The NFU wanted to see a requirement to consult beyond the immediate release site where the species in question is likely to have a large range. The Code has not clearly accommodated this ask. An example of this is on the Isle of Wight (IoW), White-Tailed Eagles were first introduced in 2019 and the consultation process only consulted farmers on the island, and not those farming the south coast of England. This was despite the knowledge and intention that the birds would expand range and ultimately settle on the mainland.

The document does outline that “*anyone who can affect or if affected by the proposals should be included*” in any consultation process and goes on to list groups that should be consulted which includes “*local community*” and references farmers and landowners/users. There is no reference to needing to consult farmers beyond the local site. The NFU will follow up with Defra.

The NFU has called for controversial or risky projects (such as the lynx) to have the licencing body, NE, conduct the consultation. This is to remove any possible or accidental bias associated with the applicant conducting the consultation. This has not been included in the revised and published code and guidance. However, section 9 on consultations now outlines the following:

‘More complex, high risk projects will usually require a more extensive stakeholder engagement process. For example, those that could or are perceived likely to result in species-human conflict. In this case, you should contact the local Natural England area office who may, in turn, advise you speak to the England Species Reintroductions Task force. The England Species Reintroductions Task force includes statutory bodies, experts and stakeholders. They may give conservation translocation advice to Defra and Natural England.’

The NFU will seek to secure a seat on this task force, as aforementioned.

Exit Strategy

The NFU called for an exit strategy to ring fence any monies to ensure funds were readily available at all stages of a project. The NFU understands exit strategies can be expensive and therefore encouraged Defra to strengthen the wording to require project applicants to demonstrate adequate funding for an Exit Strategy as part of the application and to ringfence funding as part of the licence conditions. The NFU is disappointed to see there is no reference to this in the published guidance.

The published guidance does reference damage to land and livestock as an example of where an Exit Strategy may be required, see below.

‘For example, if the translocated population becomes unhealthy or problematic by causing unacceptable levels of damage to land or livestock.’

There is no detail on who determines under what criteria “unacceptable damage”.

Project life

The NFU stressed the need for the code and guidance document to address where the responsibility for the reintroduced species lies beyond the life of the licenced project. We said this is particularly important for species that cause a high level of risk or controversy and therefore this requirement should be proportionate to the project proposal. In many cases projects will be 5-10 years long and yet the introduced species will remain in the environment beyond that period, assuming the project is a success i.e., the Exit Strategy is not triggered, and the species survive. There needs to be clarity for those within close proximity and potentially affected by the behaviour of the species of who is responsible in the long term.

There are several relevant sections of the published guidance to the above, firstly the “timescales for monitoring” section outlines the below.

*‘Start monitoring before any release, so you have a baseline to measure change against. Continue to monitor throughout your project **and usually beyond**. This is so you can check if things are going to plan, or you need further intervention. The duration of monitoring and evaluation will vary on a case-by-case basis. As a minimum, it should continue until at least one of the following apply:*

- *the population is stable*
- ***the population is behaving in a well understood, predicable and benign way***
- *the translocation has failed, and the population is extinct*
- *the translocation is failing, no further interventions are likely to be successful or feasible, and all necessary steps have been taken to avoid unnecessary harm, mortality or suffering to the translocated organisms*
- *the exit strategy is implemented’*

Section 12, Exit Strategy states the following.

*‘Your exit strategy should define what happens after goals have been met. For example, there may be a handover period where the organisation that instigated the translocation has ended its formal involvement and management is passed on to other groups. **It is important that conservation organisations are not seen to have intervened and then just abandoned a local community to live with a high maintenance, threatened species.**’*

The guidance document does not offer the clarity the NFU wanted to see regarding the responsibility beyond the project life for any troublesome species in particular. We will continue to stress this point to government.

Compensation

The NFU has concerns around the Code’s wording and the ability for NE to issue licences where the species in question posed a risk to farm businesses. In cases where this happens, NE should only issue the licence under the condition that fair and adequate compensation should be paid to any farmer, land manager or owner that is negatively affected as a consequence of the licence.

In section “Assess risk to make informed decisions” of the published documents, long term compensation is mentioned.

'Solutions to identified risks Where there is potential for harm, projects should only go ahead if acceptable solutions can be developed. Solutions include:

- *management actions to minimise impacts – for example, containment, control, damage prevention, translocation of problem animals and culling*
- ***long-term compensation agreements to offset losses***
- *a viable exit strategy for reversing the translocation if unacceptable impacts occur*
- *a risk analysis for possible pathogens that may be carried by the focal species, followed by appropriate planning, treatment, quarantine and monitoring*
- *biosecurity measures – guidance can be found at GB non-native species secretariat (NNSS)'*

Next Steps on the code and guidance

Over the coming weeks and months, the NFU will analyse in greater detail the content of the code and guidance document and seek to engage with Defra on the content. The NFU continues to engage locally and nationally on individual project proposals that pose a risk to farm businesses.

Beavers and other referenced species

Secretary of State (SoS), George Eustace said in yesterday that Defra is taking a “positive view” of beaver reintroductions. The National Beaver Strategy consultation is due this summer and the NFU will be responding in full. The NFU has serious concerns over beaver reintroductions into the landscape given their activity directly leads to the creation of wetland habitat which can have implications for productive farmland and land drainage ability, as well as, jeopardising other landscape features such as riverbanks. Should beavers be introduced into the wider landscape, a long-term management plan will be fundamental.

Other species mentioned yesterday were the Golden Eagle, the wildcat, the pine martin, the corncrake and the curlew. The NFU will continue to monitor all relevant species reintroduction proposals and seek to influence those that pose a threat to the farming community.

The NFU will also continue to engage with government. Species reintroductions must be carefully considered to ensure the many benefits the countryside delivers are not threatened.