

## Scottish Beavers – Reinforcing the Knapdale Beaver Population

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### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report:

- briefs members on the steps being taken to reinforce the beaver population in Knapdale with a view to building a sustainable population in the area;
- notes that the project partners, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, have applied for a licence to release additional beavers into Knapdale;
- notes that this is a time-limited project for three years;
- notes that there has been community engagement on the project;
- notes that a Stakeholder Group is proposed to liaise between the project, the communities of Knapdale and local stakeholders;
- asks members:
  - whether they wish to offer support to the project;
  - whether they wish to nominate a Chairperson for the Stakeholder Group

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Scottish Beaver Trial between 2009 and 2014 saw the release of limited numbers of Eurasian beavers (*Castor fiber*) into lochs in North Knapdale. This was the first licensed release of beavers into the wild in the UK. The objectives of the Scottish Beaver Trial were to monitor the effects of a pilot reintroduction of beavers into a defined area.
- 2.2 The outcome of the trial was the report *Beavers in Scotland*, submitted by Scottish Natural Heritage to the Scottish Government in June 2015. That report summarised the effects of beavers on both the natural environment and the human environment. It made recommendations for future scenarios for beavers in Scotland and management strategies.
- 2.3 Scottish Ministers decided on 22 November 2016 that they were minded that the beaver populations in Knapdale in Argyll and in the Tay and Earn catchments could remain in Scotland. The decision was subject to satisfactory completion of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and a Habitats Regulations Assessment which could now be undertaken. The intention is that beavers in Scotland would be given protection under the law as a European Protected Species as soon as is practicable after completion of the Assessment processes.

### 3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Committee support the establishment of a sustainable and expanding beaver population in Knapdale.
- 3.2 That the Committee nominate a chairperson for the Stakeholder Group.

#### **4.0 DETAIL**

- 4.1 The new project, a partnership between the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, aims actively to reinforce the number of beavers in Knapdale. The reinforcement will help increase the population of beavers in Knapdale and contribute towards the establishment and expansion of a sustainable population.
- 4.2 The existing population of beavers in Knapdale was never intended to be the focus of a sustainable breeding population and will die out without reinforcement.
- 4.3 A number of new release sites have been identified and additional animals, up to approximately 28 in number, will be released over the next two to three years. The project area will have the same geographic extent as the original licensed area for the Scottish Beaver Trial.
- 4.4 The beavers brought to Knapdale will be derived in the main from captive wild groups and the now well-established wild population on Tayside. Selected animals will be from Bavarian ancestry to improve the genetic diversity of the Knapdale population, which was brought from Norway.
- 4.5 All animals captured with a view to relocation in Knapdale will be subject to full veterinary screening and health checks prior to release.
- 4.6 This service does not identify any significant public health risks from the presence of beavers in Knapdale nor more widely in the environment. This is supported from the outcome of the public health monitoring which was an integral part of the initial beaver's pilot
- 4.7 The project team intend to hold an annual Stakeholder Event in Knapdale to liaise with the local communities and other interested parties. The Council has been invited to nominate a chairperson for the Stakeholder Events.

#### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 There have been mixed views on the pilot to reintroduce the Beaver into Knapdale although the final report identified economic benefits and no public health detriment. The new project, a partnership between the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, aims actively to reinforce the number of beavers in Knapdale

**Executive Director Development and Infrastructure**

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