

Net Zero, Energy and  
Transport Committee  
c/o Clerk to the Committee  
Room T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

20 May 2022

**Your ref: Translocate Protected Beavers to Reduce Licensed Killing (PE1815)**

**Dear Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee,**

NatureScot welcomes the opportunity to provide an update on our work with Beavers in Scotland.

We are currently in the final stages of leading the co-production of a National Beaver Strategy, the aim of which is to provide an inclusive, informed and forward looking strategy for beaver restoration in Scotland. This is expected to be completed and published in July.

In parallel, NatureScot is also actively exploring new potential translocation projects with the public agencies and other interested parties for release later this year. We are scoping the risks and benefits of beaver releases into new catchments and are increasing our staff resource to support trapping and translocation projects accordingly.

The following information is provided in response to your specific queries regarding the protection of Scotland's beaver population.

**Processes in place for European Protected Species (EPS) licensing**

The licensing requirements and process are the same for all EPS licencing. NatureScot assess all applications against the relevant licensing 'tests' as laid out in the [Conservation \(Natural Habitats, &c.\) Regulations 1994](#) (as amended), which are as follows:

1. that there is a licensable purpose
2. that there is no satisfactory alternative, and
3. that the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

The satisfactory alternatives considered are those mitigation measures which do not require a derogation (licence) in their own right. Where there are mitigation measures which result in a lower

impact on the individual but still require a derogation, such as translocation then NatureScot actively advise and encourage this where it is possible to do so.

Beavers are therefore treated entirely consistently with other species afforded the same protection. The need and demand for licences does of course vary between the different species. Beaver management licences are almost exclusively issued for Prime Agricultural Land where they can have a significant impact on drainage and water levels affecting agricultural production.

Those who apply for licences are required to provide information to support any application. The licences are issued for the prevention of serious damage. Our assessment of applications is based on a range of information, the basis being the information being supplied by the applicant but also draws on previous studies and reports, staff experience and knowledge including in many cases site visits, where we can assess the likelihood of serious damage.

### **Beaver management**

A summary of the beaver populations and licence returns for 2021 has recently been published. This summary details that in 2021 the proportion of beavers trapped and translocated was 28% of those removed under licence; compared with 21% in 2020 and in 15% in 2019. Hence the proportion of animals that are removed that are being trapped is increasing. Since 2019 between 100 and 120 beavers have been removed from conflict sites by either trapping or lethal control each year. It is unlikely that it will be practically possible to trap all these animals but we expect to see a much higher proportion of the animals needing removed being trapped and translocated and a much smaller proportion removed by lethal control. We are seeking to identify suitable receptor sites in Scotland combined with some ongoing demand from England with the aim that at least half of those removed are translocated in the coming year.

The barriers to the use of trapping are largely practical and include;

- the availability of suitable trap sites (requirement for flat accessible sites, without rapid fluctuations in water levels, not subject to disturbance by the public),
- the success of trapping/ length of time required to trap a family causing impacts and the nature of the impacts (relating to the current levels of activity and beavers use of territory, individual behaviour).
- the ability to manage where and when control takes place

There is growing acceptance that trapping can be effective in preventing damage and a greater number of licence holders have engaged with trapping carried out by an experienced beaver ecologist. NatureScot will be working with licence holders to explore what more could be done to make trapping workable in their circumstances and to support the delivery of this work. However, at this time we do not consider it to be appropriate to revoke lethal control licences where they are still needed to prevent serious damage.

Where lethal control is carried out, the cost of control is borne by the licence holder and will that continue to be the case. The controller must attain accredited controller status and both the licence holder and accredited controller are required to submit an annual return. From August 2022, where

trapping is carried out under licence the costs will be borne by NatureScot and the trapping will be carried out by experienced personnel. Where a licence is held by the land manager they will still be required to submit an annual licence return, but the burden on the land manager to remove beavers to prevent serious damage by trapping, should be much less than where using lethal control. To note the offer of trapping has to date been provided free of charge by The Beaver Trust and prior to that by a licenced individual. However, this arrangement will be formalised by August this year (end of Kit Dependency Period when licences resume).

We published interim guidance in February this year which sets out that NatureScot will provide financial assistance with the practical implementation of projects which includes the trapping, transportation, captive care and health screening of animals in addition to mitigation works at release sites. We will also support the strategic assessment of environmental impacts in new catchments. We have secured an internal allocation for this work and will prioritise projects that will deliver the greatest benefits and present lower conflicts. We are not anticipating that funding constraints will present a barrier to such projects being supported this year.

Finally and noting the committees discussions around beavers and the use of future rural support schemes, we would add that work is ongoing to promote the use of incentives currently available that support land use changes that deliver both wider benefits and will help land managers to live along-side beavers; to identify barriers to uptake and to explore how such measures can be more accessible/effective in future schemes.

Yours sincerely,

Robbie Kernahan  
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NatureScot