



House of Commons
Environmental Audit Committee

**Invasive species:
Government response
to the Committee's First
report of Session 2019**

**First Special Report of Session
2019–21**

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Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

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First Special Report

The Environmental Audit Committee published its First Report of Session 2019, [Invasive species](#) (HC 88) on 25 October 2019. The Government's response was received on 20 April 2020 and is appended to this report.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

The government welcomes the considered and constructive recommendations from the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) following its inquiry into the impacts of invasive species and their management. This is the government's response to the Committee's report: [Invasive Species – First Report of Session 2019–20](#).

Committee's conclusions and recommendations

The government has missed its legal targets on invasive species, and we are concerned that they are not receiving the same priority and funding as animal and plant health regimes. We welcome the government coordinating work on invasive species across England, Wales and Scotland. We recommend it should review whether this should be extended to include Northern Ireland given its lack of executive. (Paragraph 16)

1. There is already a very close working relationship between all United Kingdom (UK) administrations, including Northern Ireland, on invasive non-native species (INNS). Officials from all of the UK administrations are in regular contact on a wide range of matters concerning the threats that these species present. The UK Government considers this approach to be sensible and beneficial. It is excellent that the Northern Ireland Executive has been restored and that Stormont is once again up and running. The UK Government is delighted that political leaders in Northern Ireland have agreed the New Decade, New Approach deal, which sets out the Executive's top priorities for the months and years ahead. This means that public services in Northern Ireland can be transformed, and that issues such as invasive non-native species can be addressed even more effectively by locally accountable Northern Ireland Ministers.
2. The Great Britain (GB) Programme Board on Non-native Species was established in 2005 and consists of representatives from the English, Welsh and Scottish administrations and their agencies. It provides strategic consideration of the threat of INNS and comprises senior representatives from across all Great Britain administrations and their agencies. Northern Ireland has observer status on the GB Programme Board through the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).
3. As part of the UK's preparations for leaving the European Union (EU), agreement was reached between all of the UK administrations and Ministers for the GB Programme Board to become the United Kingdom Programme Board on Non-native Species, with an expanded remit which would include Northern Ireland. Now we have left the EU, the GB Programme Board considered the position at its most recent meeting in February and it agreed to Northern Ireland's formal request for membership of the existing GB

Programme Board, therefore enabling work to continue on establishment of the UK Programme Board during the transition period. After the end of the transition period, the UK Programme Board will take on responsibilities that are currently fulfilled by the EU's Committee on Invasive Alien Species, including making recommendations to Ministers on species listing decisions for the relevant parts of the UK, and its establishment will enable even greater collaboration on invasive species between all of the administrations. The existing Non-native Risk Analysis Panel, which currently only covers Great Britain, will have a similarly expanded UK remit and the existing GB Non-native Species Secretariat, which supports both the GB Programme Board and the Risk Analysis Panel, will become the UK Non-native Species Secretariat.

4. The government acknowledges that, despite significant efforts, the number of INNS established in Britain has remained constant in terrestrial environments and has increased in the freshwater and marine environments. As set out in the [Sixth National Report to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Overview of the UK Assessments of Progress for the Aichi Targets](#), published in March 2019, the UK Government acknowledged that the impact and risk from INNS in the UK remains significant and that there is a need to make even greater efforts to tackle these species, to continue to develop plans to reduce the risk from all high priority pathways for introduction and to raise awareness of the need for stronger biosecurity.

Prevention and biosecurity

DEFRA estimates that between 36 and 48 new invasive species will become established in the next 20 years in Great Britain. Slowing the rate of arrival of invasive species is the first priority to prevent their establishment and we heard that even the smallest biosecurity measures are worth taking. (Paragraph 22)

We welcome the publication of the government's comprehensive pathway analysis and recommend that it completes pathway action plans for all ten of its listed priorities by the end of 2020. (Paragraph 23)

5. Following the comprehensive analysis of pathways of introduction and spread carried out in 2019, Defra and the GB Non-native Species Secretariat prioritised six pathways in accordance with Article 13 of the EU Invasive Alien Species Regulation. These are: (1) hull fouling; (2) horticulture escapes; (3) contaminants of ornamental plants; (4) ballast water; (5) stowaways on fishing equipment; (6) zoo or botanic garden escapes. Due to the different timescales of pathway action plan (PAP) development and the pathway analysis, there is not a direct correlation between the categories in the analysis and the focus of the PAPs. This is particularly the case for hull fouling and ballast water which are, for larger vessels, also covered by International Maritime Organization guidance and the Ballast Water Management Convention respectively.

6. The development of PAPs requires detailed consideration, involving extensive engagement with stakeholders to understand the pathways, to identify the key risks and to understand how they can best be mitigated. To date the government has completed one PAP on zoos and aquaria and a further two will be completed in early 2020 covering recreational boating, which is relevant to hull fouling, and angling, which is relevant to stowaways on fishing equipment. Work is beginning imminently on two other PAPs, for

horticultural escapes and contaminants of horticultural plants, and Defra is expecting to complete all of the PAPs by the end of 2022. Whilst stakeholders have been closely involved in the preparation of PAPs, Defra and the devolved administrations will be inviting the views of interested parties on all these PAPs via the GB Non-native Species Secretariat website.

Despite 80 other countries implementing the Ballast Water Management Convention (BWMC) the government has further delayed its implementation to 2020, six years after it was first recommended. We echo Lord Gardiner's concerns that invasive species are arriving on ships to our island nation at an alarming rate and consider this would prove to be a simple measure to limit the arrival of new species. *The government must urgently accede to the Ballast Water Management Convention at the earliest possible opportunity. The government must urgently accede to the Ballast Water Management Convention at the earliest possible opportunity.* (Paragraph 32)

7. The government recognises ballast water as one of eight unintentional pathways for the introduction and spread of INNS. As noted in the Committee's report, biosecurity and pathway control measures are critical as the first line of defence to prevent the introduction of INNS. Approximately 90 per cent of global trade is transported by ship and prevention of introduction is the main mechanism for reducing the impact of INNS in the marine environment. The approach of the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments could serve as a powerful tool within the suite of biosecurity and pathway control measures that the UK already implements and move us closer towards achieving Good Environmental Status for INNS as part of the UK Marine Strategy.

8. Since 2014, the EAC and its predecessor committee have recommended that the government should ratify the BWMC. The Department for Transport undertook to do so once the Convention came into force in September 2017. Following amendments to the BWMC, the UK's accession was scheduled for 2020 to allow time for the BWMC amendments to be accepted by the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Marine Environmental Protection Committee and so come into force. This has ensured that the UK will be implementing legislation reflected in the most up to date version of BWMC.

9. Although the UK has not yet acceded to the Convention, UK flagged vessels trading internationally and vessels flagged to a member state of the Convention are required to manage their ballast water in line with Convention requirements, which limits the associated risks. Moreover, good progress has been made with the development of UK legislation to enable the BWMC to be implemented in the UK, and the government expects the UK to accede to the Convention in the summer.

10. UK Government officials continue to work at the IMO to ensure that any future amendments to the Convention are proportionate and address the needs of the UK shipping industry whilst protecting the environment.

The import of trees and plants represents a significant pathway for the introduction of invasive species and invasive plant pathogens. We have been disappointed with a lack of engagement from the horticultural trade sector during our inquiry, with limited evidence being presented on what measures the industry is putting in place to prevent outbreaks. The example of the oak processionary moth invasion highlights the

importance of swift biosecurity and trade restrictions and better coordination across government departments. The government's new regulations are welcome, but they are too little, too late. It must be ready to legislate for other risks as soon as they are identified. (Paragraph 42)

11. There is a systematic, proactive screening of potential new and emerging plant health risks, which are listed in the UK Risk Register. This is co-ordinated, maintained and published by Defra, working in close collaboration with other plant health administrations in the UK. The register contains the details of over 1000 plant pests and pathogens which have been screened for their potential to be damaging in the UK, ca. 300 of which can impact trees. Risks are reviewed monthly by an expert group and Ministers, and prioritised for actions such as surveillance, enhanced inspection, regulation, national measures, import controls, research and awareness raising.

12. The UK currently operates the EU plant health regime to meet World Trade Organization (WTO) obligations. The Plant Health Regulation (2016/2031) came into force on 14 December 2019, replacing Directive 2000/29. As a Regulation it applies directly, but relevant supporting legislation has been introduced and the operational aspects are being delivered by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and the Forestry Commission (FC). One of the principal aims of the Regulation is to enhance plant health protection within the EU. This risk-based regime prohibits or controls the import of high risk plants and planting material. At the end of the transition period EU rules and regulations will become retained EU law.

13. The UK frequently uses national measures to enhance the biosecurity provisions in the EU Plant Health Regulation as well as statutory notification arrangements (e.g. for certain tree species) to build intelligence and facilitate targeted inspections. The UK has also introduced more protected zones than any other Member State. As well as introducing strengthened Oak Processionary Moth measures in 2018 and 2019, Defra and the devolved administrations have extended statutory notification requirements in relation to *Xylella* and in 2019 introduced national measures against the Rose Rosette Virus, which triggered agreement to introduce EU-wide measures, which are now in force.

14. Under the Plant Health Regulation, new arrangements on high risk hosts and plants for planting took effect and approximately 35 genera / species of woody plants are now prohibited from third countries, including *Betula* (birch), *Fagus* (beech), *Fraxinus* (ash), *Malus* (apple) and *Quercus* (oak), <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/smarter-rules-for-safer-food-how-to-import-from-third-countries##high-risk-plants>, unless there has been a technical dossier by the relevant National Plant Protection Organisation and a European Food Safety Authority risk assessment to show that the trade poses no risk. These genera had not previously been completely prohibited from all third countries.

15. Industry has a crucial role to fulfil in protecting plant biosecurity and Defra, APHA, FC and the devolved administrations work closely with the horticulture trade to assess the risk from particular species, and pathways, sharing intelligence, and understanding market trends. Defra has supported the development of the industry led 'Plant Healthy' assurance scheme which is due for launch in 2020, which coincides with the International Year of Plant Health. The scheme is designed to drive up biosecurity standards across the ornamental horticulture, forestry and amenity tree supply chains. The scheme requires

nurseries and horticultural businesses to receive independent audits to certify that their operations meet the requirements laid down in the 'Plant Healthy' management standard (launched by the HTA in 2019 - planthealthy.org.uk).

We welcome the introduction of DEFRA's monthly biosecurity meetings, but, given the risks and based on past performance, the government needs to ensure that these result in action with problem species identified and banned from import before they present a risk to the UK. (Paragraph 43)

Plant health

16. As referred to in the response to recommendation 5, there is a systematic, proactive screening of potential new and emerging plant health risks, which are listed in the UK Plant Health Risk Register with monthly reviews. This includes escalating relevant issues to the monthly biosecurity meeting, which was introduced following ash dieback developments in 2012. These outputs lead to the prioritised actions referred to in the response to recommendation 5, including new prohibitions and suspensions (e.g. the new list of EU-wide suspensions introduced under the Plant Health Regulation, and national legislation to prohibit the import of large oak trees from open nurseries in areas where the pest is present), national legislation to protect better against identified threats (e.g. strengthened import requirements to increase protection against the emerald ash borer), designations under the EU protected zone system and statutory notification arrangements to build intelligence and carry out targeted inspections in relation to specific trades (which includes seed potatoes, ware potatoes from certain sources, certain tree species, all prunus species and firewood).

Invasive non-native species

17. For other invasive species, where problem species are identified restrictions on imports can be considered as part of a response where they pose risks to the UK. Whilst many invasive species that arrive in the UK are unintentional introductions, and some of the key species of concern will continue to be subject to restrictions under retained EU law, we will continue to assess the specific risks posed by the trade in plants.

18. We will also use the results of the horizon scanning exercise conducted in December 2019 to identify species that are suitable for restrictions on import or sale. Any species that are identified through this exercise would be subject to a comprehensive risk assessment and we would need to ensure that any restrictions on import or sale help to deliver our biosecurity strategy, whilst also ensuring we continue to comply with relevant international obligations, such as UK commitments stemming from WTO law or any arrangements agreed as part of the UK's future trading relationship with the EU.

It should also work to support the UK horticulture industry to ensure that it relies less on imports. Given the government's intention to plant more trees, for example the northern forest, it should produce guidance for the public sector in its procurement of trees and mandate a biosecurity assurance scheme. (Paragraph 43)

19. Initiatives which increase domestic production and result in more trees and plants being grown in this country are welcomed, and under the government's plans for Future Farming we are conducting research to understand better and overcome barriers to the supply of high quality, diverse, stocking material in the UK.

20. Wherever the trees are sourced, be it home or abroad, we must place the strongest emphasis on biosecurity. Defra has supported the development of the industry-led 'Plant Healthy' assurance scheme which is due for launch in later this year. The scheme is designed to drive up biosecurity standards across the ornamental horticulture, forestry and amenity tree supply chains. The scheme requires nurseries and horticultural businesses to receive independent audits to certify that their operations meet the requirements laid down in the 'Plant Healthy' management standard (launched by the HTA in 2019 - planthealthy.org.uk).

21. The government is currently exploring options for introducing biosecurity-based procurement criteria for the supply of plants and trees under government contracts and grants. These criteria could state that prospective suppliers of plants and trees should either be members of a biosecurity-focused assurance scheme, such as the Plant Healthy scheme, or that they provide evidence that they are working to the Plant Healthy Management Standard. Prospective suppliers will also be required to demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation and requirements for plants, trees and invasive species.

22. Further, the Urban Tree Manual was published last year which provides advice on selecting and procuring the right tree for the right place in urban areas. The manual also highlights long term issues around the threats to existing trees from pests, disease and climate change, and describes the benefits to the environment and for well-being that urban trees can provide.

There is a risk that changing trade routes if we leave the EU could allow more invasive species to arrive from South America and Asia. Online trade is a new and significant risk for introducing invasive species and although regulations are in place, there is an enforcement and penalty gap. We welcome DEFRA's consideration of establishing of a dedicated INNS inspectorate. *We recommend this is established by the end of 2020 with similar resourcing to other inspectorates, to improve biosecurity at the UK's borders and tackle the risks from increased online trade and new trade routes. Should the government engage in new bilateral trade deals, invasive species must be factored into risk assessments and enhanced biosecurity measures introduced at points of entry, where risks are identified.* (Paragraph 48)

23. UK biosecurity arrangements protect the environment from pests and diseases, including INNS, and this will continue now we have left the EU. Maintaining the highest standards of biosecurity is vital to protecting our environment, economy, health and lifestyle. The government is committed to maintaining our high standards of biosecurity and to the ongoing continuous improvement of our biosecurity measures, whilst minimising any disruption to trade. The government recognises that if our global pattern of trade starts to change significantly now we have left the EU, and there is an increased volume of trade with a wider range of countries, then the risk of introduction of INNS into the UK could change. Comprehensive long-term horizon scanning exercises are conducted periodically and the first GB horizon scanning exercise undertaken in 2013 was extremely useful. The exercise was repeated in December 2019 and the results of this

will be used to help identify priority species for contingency planning, rapid response and risk assessment. Further work is needed to understand what implications this may have for biosecurity measures at points of entry.

24. There are four existing biosecurity regimes in GB and these cover Plant Health, Animal Health, Fish Health and Bee Health. All these regimes are largely successful in preventing their priority species from establishing and all are supported by inspectorates which ensure enforcement of the applicable legislation. These inspectorates vary greatly in size from around 20 staff to nearly 1,000, including support staff.

25. The government is considering carefully how best to respond to the risks highlighted by the Committee. As part of that it will be examining the case for a separate inspectorate and the functions that such an inspectorate might carry out. The government will wish to assess the costs, benefits and practicalities of a separate inspectorate as well as consider whether existing inspectorates might carry out the functions involved. At this stage we believe that many of the potential roles of an INNS inspectorate will not be carried out at the border. Some roles will be pre-border (e.g. monitoring web sales of banned plants or animals) and many will be post-border (e.g. investigating accidental escapes of animals, deliberate dumping of plants, releases as part of religious practices, etc.).

Many of the key pathways for INNS involve the general public and specific user groups such as anglers and boaters. It is vital therefore that they are aware of the risks and how to minimise them. In light of the increased resourcing provided to DEFRA at the 2019 Spending Review, we recommend that it revives its public awareness campaigns on invasive species and broadens them further than their present focus on aquatic plants. We recommend that a baseline survey is also conducted to determine the effectiveness of campaigns. (Paragraph 61)

26. The government agrees with the Committee that generating greater levels of public awareness and support is critical to tackling invasive species and that this needs resourcing. This will be considered as part of departmental business planning and future government spending reviews, including Spending Review 2020.

27. The GB Non-native Species Secretariat has, as the Committee recommends, already carried out a baseline survey of public attitudes in England to help assess the effectiveness of previous campaigns and this will be used as a baseline against which we can measure the effectiveness of increased future campaigning. We are proposing to repeat the survey in 5 to 6 years to assess progress.

28. On the specific awareness-raising campaigns:

- **Be Plant Wise:** The GB Non-native Species Secretariat, on behalf of Defra, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government, are currently reviewing the campaign and will relaunch it later in 2020. We will be revising the messaging and extending it to cover terrestrial as well as aquatic plants.
- **Check Clean Dry:** The GB Non-native Species Secretariat is in discussion with some of the English water companies about extending the very successful partnership work with them for a further five years beyond 2020 and expanding the campaign to the near Continent.

29. In addition, we are also investigating how we could best raise the level of awareness about pet escapes and releases, which is an issue that seems to be becoming more significant in the last few years.

We have been impressed by New Zealand's approach to train 150,000 people in biosecurity by 2025. The same approach in the UK would equate to two million trained members of the public which would add a significant biosecurity resilience resource. The government should significantly expand its approach to public engagement to reach a minimum of two per cent of the population (1.3 million) to help identify invasive species and respond to biosecurity outbreaks. This 'biosecurity citizens' army' would be a huge boost to the country's resilience to climate change and add significant human resources to the fight to eradicate priority species. (Paragraph 62)

30. The government agrees with the Committee that partnership working is vital to deliver long-term management of widespread species and it is particularly important to empower local groups and volunteers to manage species in their local areas. The GB INNS strategy aims to guide a strong partnership approach with NGOs, businesses, government and the general public working together to improve biosecurity and reduce the risk from INNS.

31. Local Action Groups (LAGs) provide a key resource to help manage many species and raise awareness and they have mobilised a large number of volunteers in the fight against invasive species. Other stakeholders also play a key role, such as Angling Trust members undertaking clearance of Himalayan balsam on river banks and trapping signal crayfish in their ponds. British Canoeing is part of a strategic approach to floating pennywort control and its members participate in organised control work alongside the Environment Agency (EA) and the Canal & River Trust. Crucially, British Canoeing are regularly active on waterways where they have access, and are well placed to spot small outbreaks of the weed and to remove them safely, and then reporting the locations to the EA. With over 35,000 members, British Canoeing has great potential to help identify and control new outbreaks of this weed.

32. Asian Hornet Action Teams are also assisting in the response to Asian hornet incursions, particularly with the identification of suspected sightings. The government also makes extensive use of citizen science to support detections of new species and to monitor their spread. This includes the Asian hornet alert system which received 8,011 alerts in 2018 and 6,702 alerts in 2019. Between April 2018 and March 2019, the Tree Health Diagnostic and Advisory Service dealt with 2,463 enquiries, 700 more than in 2017, and TreeAlert was the source of around 56 per cent of these enquiries. During the first 10 months of 2019, Observatree volunteers spent more than 4,800 hours on the project and submitted over 3,600 tree health survey reports.

33. Volunteers are not a cost-free resource, requiring funding to recruit volunteers, to plan their work effectively and to manage it. It is also essential that those involved in managing INNS receive sufficient training and guidance to ensure efficacy. The government does recognise, however, that there is more to be done to tackle INNS and we will closely examine the New Zealand model for the mobilisation of large numbers of people. Citizen science is a vital addition to government surveillance, providing more eyes on the ground and shared responsibility, which improves our overall biosecurity

culture. We are assessing the options to facilitate the expansion of current local action into a 'biosecurity citizens' army', as recommended by the Committee and are considering the need for a full-time LAG co-ordinator to help with co-ordination of existing local action.

We support Water Resources in the South East's demand for clear guidelines on water transfers, and call on government to work with water companies to develop guidance and standards to manage the risks involved. The starting point should be that the transferring company should be certified as INNS free before a transfer takes place. (Paragraph 63)

34. In 2017 the EA published a position statement setting out a risk-based approach to the transfer of raw water, for both new and existing transfers.

35. The EA's risk-based approach acknowledges that many of the INNS that populate water industry assets cannot be eradicated, and once established, have a high cost to the water industry in addition to their environmental cost. It is therefore preferable to avoid opening new pathways across water catchments which could allow current and future INNS to travel.

36. The EA is working with water companies to assess how to reduce or eliminate the risk of spread of INNS across new transfers and to understand what current and future methods could be effective. The EA's priority is new transfers that will join otherwise isolated catchments. In these situations, we ask for elimination of all life stages and species of INNS, to ensure the transfer infrastructure will not allow spread of current or new INNS. For transfers in already connected catchments, our approach is proportionate to the additional risk of spread created by the transfer and focusses on risk reduction rather than elimination.

37. There could be unintended adverse consequences to assessing INNS-free status and certifying a transferring company as "INNS free" in advance of a transfer, as given the frequency of arrival of new INNS from outside the country, and spread of current INNS, the status could change rapidly. In addition, INNS in the early stages of invasion are difficult to detect due to their low densities. The proposed INNS-free certification approach, based on detection of INNS species at the transfer source, would create the risk of spread of species which are not possible to eradicate and have a high financial and environmental cost.

38. As part of the 2019 Price Review, all Water Companies with existing transfers are expected to set out the risks of spread of INNS associated with those transfers, and investigate options to reduce that risk. These investigations form part of water company business plans from 2020–2025.

The UK is very good at horizon scanning for new invasive species, but is poor at taking action as a result. The government needs to be more proactive, using its horizon scans to inform border authorities and inspectorates of new threats before they arrive. (Paragraph 69)

39. The government agrees with the Committee that horizon scanning is a key tool for helping prioritise our efforts. The first GB horizon scanning exercise in 2013 was extremely useful and underpinned the targeting of limited resources for contingency planning for key species that were likely to arrive and have negative impacts. We repeated this exercise

in December 2019, extending it to cover economic and human health impacts. The results of this latest exercise will be used to prioritise our resources more effectively, to identify priority species for contingency planning and rapid response, as well as for completion of comprehensive risk assessments which will inform decisions on whether import or sale of identified species should be restricted.

The UK will need to replace the European Commission's invasive species functions in the event we leave the EU. We are satisfied that the expertise for this exists, but question whether extra funding may be needed to replace its role. The government must ensure that there is ongoing collaboration with the EU on research and the list of species of Union concern to counter new risks. (Paragraph 70)

40. The UK has significant expertise in INNS and the GB Non-native Risk Analysis Panel (NNRAP) is chaired by Professor John Mumford of Imperial College London. Our comprehensive risk analysis process is based on independent academic oversight and, given the current role in GB risk assessment of NNRAP, at this stage we are not anticipating a significant increase in its workload to fulfil a widened remit for the whole of the UK now we have left the EU.

41. The UK is committed to ongoing international co-operation on INNS with the EU and other countries now we have left the EU. There will be legal obligations under retained EU law (the retained EU Invasive Alien Species Regulation) for Ministers to make every effort to ensure close co-ordination, and to endeavour to co-operate with, other countries, including the Republic of Ireland after we leave. The British-Irish Council (BIC) was established under the Good Friday Agreement and co-operation between members on INNS is enabled through the Council. BIC Ministers collectively recognised the threat posed by these species and a package of measures was agreed to strengthen biosecurity across Great Britain, the island of Ireland and Crown Dependencies. The UK also has obligations relating to INNS under many international agreements including: the Convention on Biological Diversity; the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention); and the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention).

42. The fundamental principles and criteria for listing species will not change when the EU Invasive Alien Species Regulation becomes part of retained EU law, albeit there will be a change in focus from EU to UK level. Under retained EU law, there will be an obligation on the Secretary of State to undertake a comprehensive review of the list of species of special concern before 2 August 2022.

43. The Government has indicated in the [UK's approach to negotiations on the future relations with the EU](#) (published February 2020) that the UK will consider a relationship in line with non-EU Member State participation in certain EU programmes, including the Horizon Europe research and innovation framework programme. Any agreements relating to Union programmes should contain fair terms for UK participation. This should include fair treatment of participants, a fair and appropriate financial contribution, provisions allowing for sound financial management by both parties, and appropriate governance and consultation.

44. However, the government is also exploring in parallel credible and ambitious alternatives to deliver positive outcomes for science, research and innovation in the event

that the UK does not participate in Horizon Europe. The government commissioned Professor Sir Adrian Smith of the Alan Turing Institute, and Professor Graeme Smith of University College London, to provide independent advice on options for future UK funding schemes for international collaboration on research and innovation. Their report 'Changes and Choices' to BEIS was published on 5 November 2019.

45. Projects funded under the EU LIFE programme have played an important role in helping to implement environment policy in the UK, including projects to tackle invasive species. Under the financial settlement, the UK will continue to contribute to the EU budget in respect of the EU's current financial planning period (the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014–20) and will continue to participate and benefit from its programmes and receive receipts for the duration of projects, which in most cases go beyond 2020. This means UK organisations can participate in the 2020 LIFE call with confidence.

46. The government's 25 Year Environment Plan states that public funding sources will continue to play an important role in protecting and enhancing the natural environment in the UK, including for tackling invasive species. Decisions on public funding for the environment will be taken as part of the next multi-year Spending Review when priorities can be looked at strategically across government.

Tackling invasive species

We welcome the government funding biological controls for invasive plants and we are reassured that the risks are being thoroughly assessed prior to their release into the natural environment. *The government should look to rapidly expand support for biocontrol research in the future.* (Paragraph 85)

47. The government recognises the need for significant continued investment in research on biological control for invasive plants. Defra is the major long-term funder of this work and has supported biological control since 2003, contributing over £1.5 million. Defra has funded research to identify and establish safe biological control of the invasive non-native plants Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, Australian swamp stonecrop and floating pennywort.

48. We continue to support research into biological control, and welcome the engagement of water companies as new project partners, which demonstrates that beneficiaries of biocontrol recognise the value to them and are willing to invest in this work. We welcome other organisations joining the partnership in the future.

49. Several Local Action Groups, including The Avon Invasive Species Project, are working with CABI to support the release and monitoring of the psyllid biocontrol agent in their areas.

50. The RAPID LIFE project is supporting efforts to establish and spread the biocontrol agents for Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam in its five regions across England. It is also carrying out two catchment-scale demonstration projects on Japanese knotweed control (in the Bristol Avon and Wensum) using best practice chemical and mechanical methodologies.

In law, landowners have the responsibility for invasive species, yet there is no enforcement method for Agencies to compel them to tackle invasive species or provide

funding for them to act or to act on their behalf. *The management of invasive species should feature as one of the public benefits in the government's new environmental land management scheme that is to be developed under its Agriculture Bill. We regret the delay to this important piece of legislation and urge the government to introduce it early in this new Parliamentary session.* (Paragraph 90)

51. The government's updated Agriculture Bill was introduced to Parliament on 16 January. Our new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme will be the cornerstone of our future agricultural policy. Founded on the principle of "public money for public goods", ELM is intended to provide a powerful vehicle for achieving the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan and commitment to net zero carbon emissions. Land managers will be paid for delivering the following public goods set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan: clean air; clean and plentiful water; thriving plants and wildlife; protection from and mitigation of environmental hazards; beauty, heritage and engagement; mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. Where efforts to reduce the pressure from invasive species contribute towards these public goods there may be funding available for them through the new scheme.

We consider there needs to be a more joined up policy approach with pathogens included in the scope of the GB Non Native Species Secretariat and Strategy, particularly diseases affecting wildlife. *We recommend that the next Invasive Non Native Species Strategy includes invasive pathogens given the large threat they pose to the environment and economy and since their methods of prevention and control are broadly similar.* (Paragraph 95)

52. We are mindful of potential gaps that may exist between the different elements of biosecurity and we will ensure that when we next review our INNS strategy that these areas are adequately covered. We have followed the same approach that is applied at EU-level, where pathogens are covered by animal and plant health legislation, but not under invasive alien species legislation. We are, therefore, keen to avoid any overlap with other elements of biosecurity that are already well covered, such as animal health and plant health.

The government has shown that it can effectively coordinate action on tackling certain invasive species, notably in its approach to the Asian hornet. It is vital that the public are aware of the key species that need a rapid response and where alert systems exist, so they can contribute to the process. The main blocker to effective rapid response and eradication of invasive species is funding and as part of this, expert capacity. Invasive species receive a fraction of the budget that other plant and animal health regimes do, despite their high environmental cost. (Paragraph 106)

For widespread invasive species, we support the government meeting the requirements of the EU Regulations, but it must take a risk based approach, taking into account the costs and benefits of action and the balance of funding should fall to prevention and rapid response. (Paragraph 107)

53. We agree with the Committee that, whilst we need to devote greater resources to prevention and rapid response, we cannot neglect control of widespread species that are causing significant negative impacts. We already take a risk-based approach and we will continue to pursue a similar approach, balancing the benefits of action against the costs.

Funding to the Non Native Species Secretariat must be increased to at least £3 million a year to meet its key priorities. This would ensure that rapid responses to threats are undertaken with the specialist capacity required, saving on long term management costs. The government should also establish an emergency fund for rapid responses where agencies need short term funding to tackle a threat. (Paragraph 108)

54. The GB Non-native Species Secretariat carried out a comprehensive review of resource needs for invasive species in 2017/18. This showed that, whilst the UK is leading the way in Europe, current action is insufficient to curb the growing threat. We recognise the need for significantly greater resources for prevention, as a contingency for rapid responses, as well as for public awareness. This will be considered as part of departmental business planning and future government spending reviews, including Spending Review 2020. Defra monitors on-going requirements throughout the year and is able to re-prioritise resources if needed.

We welcome the valuable contribution made by volunteers in Local Action Groups, which is a good model akin to the New Zealand approach. Yet the government should take a more strategic, coordinated and resourced approach. We regret that one third of the Local Action Groups established by DEFRA no longer exist. The government should fund Local Action Groups on a long term (five yearly basis) and coordinate them through the Non Native Species Secretariat. It should also undertake a review of Local Action Groups to identify where best practice can be replicated and rolled out across the country. (Paragraph 109)

55. We agree with the Committee that LAGs make a vital contribution to the fight against invasive species, especially in relation to control of widespread species, but also for awareness raising, alerts and some rapid responses. For example, over a two-year period (2012 to 2014), LAGs in England contributed over 77,000 volunteer hours to tackling INNS.

56. This volunteer effort, as well as helping native species and habitats to recover, can significantly improve people's health and wellbeing through increasing exercise, providing access to green spaces and aiding social cohesion. The increased use of social prescribing in the NHS, which connects patients to community groups to harness these benefits, could provide larger volunteer pools for LAGs. 60 per cent of clinical commissioning groups in England now have social prescribing schemes and the number is growing.

57. We also agree that LAGs would benefit from increased resourcing and a more strategic steer. The review of resources carried out by the GB Non-native Species Secretariat suggested that approximately £340,000 is needed to help develop a more strategic, coordinated and resourced network of LAGs. This will be considered as part of departmental business planning and future government spending reviews, including Spending Review 2020.

UK Overseas Territories

The UK Overseas Territories are home to 90 per cent of the UK's biodiversity and most are at a heightened risk from invasive species since their wildlife has evolved over thousands of years without many predators, competitors and disease. The greatest gap in biosecurity has been found to be preventing species arriving, which is exacerbated by new infrastructure projects introducing invasive species and lack of biosecurity legislation and enforcement. We welcome the work carried out by the GB Non

Native Species Secretariat supporting the OTs with pathway analysis and biosecurity legislation. This must be scaled up and fully resourced to ensure that each OT has up to date biosecurity legislation and adequate powers of enforcement and resources and expertise to carry it out by the end of 2020. (Paragraph 123)

58. There is an ongoing need to provide resources and expertise to the Overseas Territories (OTs) in developing and implementing comprehensive biosecurity systems. Biosecurity training has been provided to OTs and online biosecurity tool kits have been developed, including field guides to help local biosecurity staff identify invasive invertebrate species. The provision of draft biosecurity legislation is also progressing well for those Territories which have requested drafting support.

59. The GB Non-native Species Secretariat has been integral to this work, while wider government funding has also supported projects to increase biosecurity capacity across the Territories, on land and at sea. For example, Darwin Plus funding has supported a project in Bermuda which has provided a much better understanding of lionfish feeding ecology and led to significant advances in trap design, which could form an important control measure for this invasive non-native species. In South Georgia, another Darwin Plus project has helped to reduce the range and extent of some of the island's 41 non-native invasive plant species, with plans in place to continue this work.

60. Tackling invasive non-native species will remain a priority for future public funding and support for the Overseas Territories, including to enable the GB Non Native Species Secretariat to continue such important work in 2020–21.

Large scale eradication projects present huge opportunities to protect and restore rare, unique and critically endangered wildlife in the UK Overseas Territories. Yet they fall between two stools, being ineligible for many domestic funding opportunities and also being exempt from any international funds. EU funding has played an important role in funding environment and conservation work in the UKOTs and we expect the government to ensure that these vital projects continue to be funded in the event that the UK leaves the EU. *The government must commit to at least replacing EU funding to the Overseas Territories in the event of leaving the EU. The government should also consider implementing a system to match-fund contributions from private partners for large scale eradication projects.* (Paragraph 124)

61. The government remains committed to supporting the unique biodiversity of the Overseas Territories. We recognise the benefits of large scale eradication projects, such as the HMG-supported South Georgia Heritage Trust's Habitat Restoration project. In 2018, the project declared South Georgia rodent-free for the first time since humans arrived on the island over 200 years ago, and native bird populations including the South Georgia pipit, the South Georgia pintail and Wilson's storm petrel have quickly recolonised formerly rat-infested areas.

62. Although the final stage of RSPB's Gough Island eradication programme to eradicate non-native mice has now been postponed because of the impacts of COVID-19, the government will continue to support efforts to save the critically endangered Tristan albatross and Gough bunting.

63. We agree with the Committee that EU funding, such as the EU BEST programme, has played an important role in helping to implement environment policy in the Overseas

Territories. The 25 Year Environment Plan makes clear that public funding will continue to play an important role in protecting and enhancing our natural environment in the Overseas Territories. The announcement of the increase to £10 million per annum in the Darwin Plus Programme from 2021–22 underlines the government's commitment to protect the Overseas Territories' unique environments, including through funding projects to tackle the threat posed by invasive non-native species.

Acronyms

APHA: Animal and Plant Health Agency

BWMC: Ballast Water Management Convention

DAERA: Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

EA: Environment Agency

EAC: Environmental Audit Committee

ELM: Environmental Land Management

EU: European Union

FC: Forestry Commission

GB: Great Britain

INNS: Invasive non-native species

IMO: International Maritime Organization

LAG: Local Action Group

NNRAP: Non-native Risk Analysis Panel

OTs: Overseas Territories

PAP: Pathway action plan

UK: United Kingdom

WTO: World Trade Organization