

## Written evidence submitted by the Norfolk Rivers Trust (SR0001)

### Norfolk Rivers Trust response to Call for Evidence for Species Reintroduction

*What role should species reintroductions play in the delivery of the government's biodiversity and nature recovery goals? Should specific objectives / targets be set for species reintroductions?*

Species reintroductions are critical to the government's biodiversity and nature recovery goals, both as an end in themselves and also as a step towards re-building healthy, in-tact, resilient eco-systems. The role of beavers is well understood in re-building river health. Although other lost species have less dramatic impacts they nevertheless play a critical part in food-web structure, e.g. the burbot *Lota lota*, a lost freshwater fish played a critical role in fenland rivers, both as a predator / scavenger and as a key food item for otters, herons, trout, eels etc. Re-introducing *any* native species will help support the rest of the UK's flora and fauna.

DEFRA should have specific time-bound and measurable targets for species reintroduction. Most of the necessary knowledge already exists within Natural England and its counterparts, and many NGOs are also working on reintroduction plans (Beaver Trust, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, Norfolk Rivers Trust).

*How can the government maximise the potential benefits from species reintroduction, and ensure the correct species are reintroduced in the correct places?*

Feasibility studies have already been undertaken for many species (e.g. burbot at Norfolk Rivers Trust) highlighting historic range, current appropriate habitat location and chance of success. Natural England have most of this information. In order to maximise benefits it may be beneficial to look at potential for multiple introductions in certain areas (such as the landscape recovery areas) and assessing which species may complement each other, for example beavers and burbot.

*What role should Landscape Recovery and Local Nature Recovery Schemes, under ELMS, have in supporting species reintroduction?*

It is critical that, under ELMS, land-owners are able to create space or habitat for reintroduced species. The current lack of ability to do this is holding up beaver release in Norfolk and probably elsewhere. Landscape Recovery should be used as a tool, if necessary, to allow this to happen, whether through funding river corridors for beavers, deer fencing for natural forest regeneration or stock protection or compensation for lynx reintroduction. Landscape Recovery can also help pave the way for reintroductions by helping build better receptor habitat, and better connected habitats, expanding possible range and enhancing the chances of success.

*How effective is current government policy and 2021 guidance in leading and managing species reintroductions? Should any changes be made to its policies and guidance?*

In Norfolk Rivers Trust's experience of reintroducing beavers and working towards reintroducing burbot government policy has been a hinderance rather than help. We quite rightly have very good legislation for biosecurity and environmental protection, but working around this legislation to do something "out of the ordinary" (such as importing and releasing burbot) can be very difficult, and

will potentially stop several valuable projects. It may be a good idea to appoint a species reintroduction Tsar with sufficient remit to work across organisations to assist these projects.

*What improvements can be made in how local communities, landowners and other land users are engaged and consulted on reintroduction proposals? What practical steps can be taken to reduce conflict with these groups?*

In Norfolk Rivers Trust's experience, local communities have been hugely supportive of species reintroductions (beavers, burbot and sea eagles) while land-owners have been far more reluctant, and can ultimately block projects. For the local communities local media, social media and community events (village hall talks) can be very useful in explaining reasons, allaying fears rising from misinformation and building support. Communication with land-owners is also critical for the same reasons, but stewardship payments are equally important, and assurance that the reintroduced species will be properly "managed". As an NGO it is very difficult to give this assurance, as we may be short-lived, so this may also be a factor for DEFRA to explore. Currently the "conflict" between groups is a good thing, as having the land-owners aware that the public are supportive can be very helpful.

*How could the development of long-term management plans and regulatory regimes for reintroduced species control be improved?*

By ensuring that in the case of species such as lynx and beaver that could have a genuine impact on land-owners, long-term funding and support is guaranteed. Without this the more dramatic introductions are unlikely to happen. NGOs are unlikely to be able to guarantee longer-term funding and without this land-owners will not consent.

In the case of the less dramatic species, long term monitoring is also critical, to evaluate impacts and success and inform further reintroductions.

*What can the government do to help prevent unregulated species reintroductions?*

Show progress in regulated species reintroductions. Releases of beavers and other species are often born of frustration at government inertia.

*What lessons could the UK government and Natural England learn from reintroduction in other jurisdictions, in UK and Europe?*

In Europe governments have been far more pro-active with species reintroductions, taking responsibility for planning, monitoring and management, with NGO's playing a lesser role. I believe the same is true in the US, with government agencies taking the lead. The Netherlands, Germany and Romania all have compensation schemes for damage caused by beavers, bears, etc, and in most cases have trained staff prepared to respond to incidents such as beaver dams in low-lying agricultural areas. Lessons in management can easily be learned from these countries from people with decades of experience.

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