**Written evidence submitted by the National Farmers Union (SR0038)**

**January 2023**

## About the NFU

The NFU represents 55,000 members across England and Wales. In addition, we have 20,000 NFU Countryside members with an interest in farming and rural life. The NFU champions British agriculture and horticulture, to campaign for a stable and sustainable future for our farmers and growers. The evidence below has been put together following consultation and feedback with NFU members.

## Summary


**Species goals, objectives, and targets**
The NFU is concerned about the challenges of predicting reintroduction outcomes through, for example, goals or targets before populations are released or established. Goals and targets must have a clear evidence base for inclusion that fully considers the impact on food and farming, recognises the risk variabilities associated with a reintroduction, be achievable, measurable, and affordable, and have the right supportive policy mechanisms in place.

**Right species and maximising benefits**
To help ensure that a species is reintroduced to the right place and that species is right for England, Government must ensure it has undertaken an impact assessment for each species reintroduction. Where a species reintroduction has potential to spread and cause wider impacts, the NFU would like to see a national consultation undertaken and a species-specific strategy developed.

**Scheme funding**
Those proposing reintroduction projects should secure funding for the entirety of the project. Once reintroduction projects have come to an end or where there are illegal populations, farmers and landowners will need support from Government to help mitigate against and manage any potential impacts on farming and food production. This should cover the longer-term management of that species including compensation for any damage.

**Government guidance**
The NFU would also like to see Government develop and implement a framework which clearly outlines the process they will follow when managing species reintroductions in England. This framework should clearly explain what steps Government will take when managing species reintroductions and in what order. The steps should include a national impact assessment, a national stakeholder consultation, and the development of a species-specific strategy. The NFU would like to see the Government's existing guidance and code on species reintroduction projects strengthened in a few areas including on stakeholder consultation, project management and exit strategies.

**Engagement and consultation**
Several important steps should be taken to help reduce species reintroduction project conflicts with local communities, landowners, and other land users. These include the need for species reintroduction projects to be based on sound scientific evidence that includes a feasibility and impact assessments which shows the impact the reintroduction could have on food, farming, and other species. The proposal and the impacts must be clearly communicated and consulted on. If a species is reintroduced there must be adequate management options, funding, and support to prevent and deal with the impacts, as well as manage the species during the project and in the longer-term.

**Long-term management plans and regulatory regimes**

The NFU would also like to see Government develop and implement a framework which clearly outlines the process they will follow when managing species reintroductions in England. This framework should clearly explain what steps Government will take when managing species reintroductions and in what order. The steps should include a national impact assessment, a national stakeholder consultation, and the development of a species-specific strategy. There must be regular and clear communication from Government, including NFU involvement in the England Species Reintroduction Taskforce announced in May 2021.

**Unregulated species reintroductions**
The current approach to illegal releases of for example, beavers, needs to be backed up with stronger action by Government. Farm businesses should not have to bear the costs of the illegal activity of others. It should be for the Government and regulators to bear this responsibility and cost as part of their enforcement regimes. This cost must include compensation for the damage illegal populations have caused.

**Lessons and learnings**
While species reintroduction lessons and learnings must be taken into consideration by Government and can be used to inform project stakeholder engagement, it is important to remember that Great Britain is an island with multiple unique ecosystems. Its geographical size, climate, population, infrastructure, and farming systems will be different to elsewhere. The suitability of England for a species and/or how its managed will differ and must be carefully considered by Government.

**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 reintroduction?**

1. As outlined in the Government's *25 Year Environment Plan*, 'reintroductions, when carefully planned and managed, can enrich our natural environment and provide wider benefits for people'.

1.1 The NFU recognises the role reintroductions can play in delivering nature recovery but believes species recovery efforts and management should focus on species already present in England before undertaking reintroductions.

1.2 After decades of absence, reintroductions can be high risk for both the success of the species and the potential impacts and costs it could have.

1.3 Given the unpredictable and long-term nature of a species reintroduction, Government should take a cautious approach in setting specific goals and targets that rely on there being, for example, a certain population size or an area of habitat created by that species. At a later point, Government needs to be prepared to revise goals or targets originally set to reflect actual circumstances.

1.4 Decisions about new goals and targets must have a clear evidence base that recognises the risk variabilities associated with a reintroduction, be achievable, measurable, and affordable, and have the appropriate supportive policy mechanisms in place.

1.5 It is important to understand how any new targets or goals relate to and interact with existing or proposed targets such as tree planting or net zero objectives.

1.6 Any new species goals or targets must further consider:
- What impact they could have on farming and food production.
- The impact of 21st century challenges such as population growth and climate change.

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

2. To maximise potential benefits and ensure that the right species are reintroduced to the right place, decision making must incorporate the present and future needs of that species. The NFU would like to see Government develop and implement a framework which outlines the process they will follow when managing species reintroductions in England. This framework should clearly explain what steps Government will take when managing species reintroductions and in what order. The steps should include a national impact assessment, a national stakeholder consultation, and the development of a species-specific strategy. The framework will help to minimise the impact, risks, and unintended consequences of a reintroduction. In some cases, this could mean a species is concluded unsuitable for reintroduction regionally or nationally.

2.1 The NFU would like to see Government conduct an **impact assessment** for each species reintroduction to England that considers the social, economic, and environmental impact of that species in England in the short, medium, and longer term. The NFU has concerns that individual species reintroduction projects focus on the risks and impacts in that specific area/catchment, but not the impact of that species if it was to become more widespread across England.

2.2 Where an impact assessment identifies that a species reintroduction has the potential to cause wider consequences beyond specific area or catchment, there must be a national independent **consultation** on the proposed reintroduction. The consultation should include a proposed long-term vision for that species which would be outline what management, regulatory regimes and exit plans may be required, all of which would be outlined in a species-specific strategy. The consultation must consult on how any existing illegal populations of that species are managed. Impacted stakeholders such as farmers and landowners must be consulted with throughout, who is consulted must be outlined in the framework

2.3 If a species reintroduction has potential to spread and cause wider impacts a national **species-specific strategy** should be developed as part of the consultation. This must consider what the long-term vision is for that species, as well as what management, regulatory regimes and exit plans may be required. This strategy must be in place ahead of the species being reintroduced and protected. This strategy should also consider how this species interacts with other species and how as a result those species could be managed e.g., red squirrel and grey squirrel.

2.4 To understand if a reintroduction could be successful, the true cost of that reintroduction must be understood. Where farmers and landowners are more than likely to be impacted by a species reintroduction, they should not be expected to take on the management and cost of a reintroduced species. Farmers need to understand what management may be required or if crops and livestock would be at risk from a species reintroduction to ensure they can respond objectively to any consultation.

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

3. The Government has committed to maintain the farming budget for the duration of this Parliament. The activities in ELMS need to be deliverable by farmers and complement their farming businesses.

3.1 Those proposing reintroduction projects should secure funding for the entirety of the project (project group, project officer, impacts, exit strategy etc.) through other routes, such as private funding rather than through ELMS.

3.2 Once reintroduction projects have come to an end or where there exist illegal populations, farmers and landowners will need support from Government to help mitigate against and manage any potential impacts on farming and food production. This should cover the longer-term management of that species including compensation for any damage. This support should not be viewed as justification for releasing a species that has potential to cause significant impacts or conflicts.

**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?**

4. Given the unique nature of each species introduction, it is vital that the 'Reintroduction and other conservation translocation: code and guidance for England' is accompanied by further species-specific policy and guidance.

4.1 The NFU would like clarity from Government about how the code is applied and the factors considered when a species introduction licence application is reviewed. The NFU would like to see clarification included in the framework which outlines the process Government will follow when managing a species reintroduction. In some cases, how the code is interpreted may be species specific, when this is the case, the NFU would like this clearly outlined by Government in the species strategy and/or the licensing criteria.

4.2 The NFU would also like to see the existing guidance and code strengthened.

4.2.1 The guidance on the process for stakeholder consultation should recognise the need for:

- Wider geographical consultation where a species could spread.
- Weighted stakeholder responses to adequately reflect the views of those impacted by a reintroduction.
- Stakeholder consultation prior to or simultaneously alongside the gathering of public support.
- Independent licensing body (Natural England) stakeholder consultation for high conflict reintroductions.
- Consultation on what happens at the end of the trial/project.

4.2.2 The guidance on the process for project management and exit strategy should recognise the need for:

- A clear process for managing issues during the project lifespan.
- More detail about what is required at the end of a project and in an exit strategy. For instance, how it could be triggered and by who.

**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?**

5. To reduce conflicts with local communities, landowners and other land users, each species reintroduction project proposal should follow several key principles.

5.1 Project proposals must adhere to the code of reintroductions and conservation translocations in England.

5.2 Project proposals must be based on sound scientific research including feasibility and impact assessments. Both assessments must consider the short, medium, and longer-term requirements, risks and impacts of the project. The project should access and demonstrate both the social, economic, and environmental impacts (positive and negative) of that species reintroduction including how it could

affect farming and food production, other species, and infrastructure. The assessments must further consider what future species management may be required and what impact this could have on landowners and managers.

5.3 Project proposals must include early engagement and objective consultation with stakeholders who could be impacted in the short, medium, and longer term. The Government should provide project proposers with a suggested list of stakeholders to consult with in each area/catchment. The species reintroduction project consultation should cover what happens at the end of the project, and what future management may be required. Following the consultation, the proposal must be properly balanced against the concerns of stakeholders. If the proposal and subsequent licence application demonstrates an impact on agriculture and concerns from farmers, the NFU would like to see the licensing body conduct further consultation with those stakeholders prior to granting any licence.

5.4 Project proposals must have clear, balanced, and open communication to both inform stakeholders about the project. It is important that this communication presents a balanced view of the project and its impacts to ensure that those responding to the consultation can respond objectively. Communication about the future management of that species beyond the project should come from Government, not the project proposer.

5.5 Project proposals must detail the project management and funding structures. The species reintroduction project proposer is responsible for the management of that species including all costs involved ahead and during the licensing period. Farmers and land managers must not be expected to bear the burden of risk, management, and cost of the reintroduction. The project proposer must have a clear well-resourced management plan and exit strategy in place ahead of receiving a full licence and should provide readily available support and resources to impacted stakeholders.

5.6 To reduce conflicts with local communities, landowners and other land users, each species reintroduction should be underpinned by clear Government policy, and support for future management beyond the project licensing period or where there are illegal reintroductions. There should be adequate management options, support, and clear management responsibilities to prevent and deal with any impacts, as well as manage the species. This should be accompanied by readily available, sufficient, and guaranteed funding for impacted stakeholders to cover the mitigation activities, the medium to longer-term impacts and compensation for damage. Farmers and landowners must not be expected to take on the management cost, added bureaucracy and liability for reintroductions e.g., complex licensing regimes.

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

6. As a general point, the plans and regulatory regimes must be properly informed and have a sound evidence base. The NFU would welcome regular, balanced, and transparent communication from Government on its overarching species reintroduction policy and plans. **We would like to be involved in the England Species Reintroduction Taskforce announced in May 2021** - which we understand is still in development following the appointment of the Chair. The NFU would like to see Government create and implement a framework which clearly outlines the process they will follow when managing species reintroductions in England. This framework should clearly explain what steps Government will take when managing species reintroductions and in what order. The steps should include a national impact assessment, a national stakeholder consultation, and the development of a species-specific strategy. The framework should ensure that the species-specific strategy, regulatory regimes, and long-term management plans are consulted on ahead of a species being reintroduced and protected.

6.1 **The NFU would like to see Government conduct a social, economic and environment impact assessment <u>before</u> a species is reintroduced**. The assessment must consider the short- and longer-term impacts including what impact the regulatory and licensing regime would have on impacted stakeholders and their businesses. Landowners and farmers are likely to be impacted by species reintroductions but should not be expected to take on the long-term management and cost of a reintroduced species. The results of the impact assessment including the impact of the long-term management plans and regulatory regimes must be included in the stakeholder consultation prior to the species reintroduction.

6.2 If a species reintroduction has potential to spread and cause impacts at a national scale, a species-specific strategy should be developed and consulted on. This must consider what long term management and exit plans will be required. The strategy must be in place ahead of the species being reintroduced and protected. The strategy should also consider how this species interacts with other species and how as a result those species should be managed.

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

7. The current approach to illegal releases, for example in the case of beavers, needs to be backed up with stronger action by Government. With illegal beaver releases, the Government has not taken any action to remove those populations. A failure in the proper management of illegal beaver releases and populations places an unnecessary and unjust burden on farmers, the land and other species in the area of release.

7.1 **Farm businesses should not have to bear the costs of the illegal activity of others.** It should be for the Government and regulators to bear this responsibility and cost as part of their enforcement regimes. This cost must include compensation for the damage illegal populations have caused. A lack of 'teeth' in the enforcement regime only encourages more illegal activity.

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

8. It is important that we take this opportunity to learn the lessons from reintroduction in other jurisdictions. Lessons both positive and negative can be learned from other jurisdictions in the UK and from European countries which are affected by increasing populations of reintroduced species. By doing so England can begin to implement effective solutions through policies, which protect both farmers and wildlife and lessen the need for compensation schemes.

8.1 When Government develops its long-term vision for a species including what management options may be needed, they can learn from other countries approaches. For example, beavers have been in Scotland for over 20 years, the Scottish Government's vision has been outlined in a strategy and provides information about some of the opportunities and challenges of living with beavers.

8.2 Across the European Union (EU), farmers and land managers are being faced with challenges caused by increasing populations of species such as Eurasian Beavers, Eurasian Lynx, White-Tailed Eagles, Geese and Wild Boar. Protection of certain species under the 'Habitat's Directive' and 'Birds Directive', alongside ineffective management methods have in many cases seen the expansion of populations of these species.

8.3 The management, mitigation methods and compensation available to affected businesses or individuals in the EU varies by Member State and the effectiveness of these measures is under scrutiny by many affected stakeholders.

8.4 One of the key tools for the management of species is the recording of data, including the population numbers, locations and cost of the damage caused. Many Member States are now beginning to work towards understanding the exact impact of these species and their distribution to better manage their existence alongside agriculture.

8.5 Through the expansion of reintroduced species across the EU, farmers are facing the implications of less than effective policy development and implementation - ultimately increasing costs to their businesses. Examples of different European policies on species reintroduction and management are outlined below:

*8.5.1 Germany: beaver mitigation and compensation*

- In 2015, the Brandenburg Ministry for Agriculture and Environment created a program to address issues affecting local beaver populations. It included a regulation tailored to the species, €700,000 for issue prevention measures from the European Agricultural Fund for the development of rural areas funding system, two beaver managers and the implementation of specific measures such as greening measures encompassed in agricultural measures such as riparian strips (15-30m) against water ways to reduce the risk of injury to livestock caused by the beavers burrowing into the bank, as well as reduce land use conflicts with farmers.
- Following on from this work, from 1 January 2021, Germany agreed to implement a State Aid funded compensation scheme to reimburse farmers for damages caused by the activities of beavers on farmland. Predominantly focused on injuries to livestock and the associated veterinary costs, the scheme funds 100% of the cost of damage. The scheme will run until December 2027 and has an allocated budget of €3,850,000.

*8.5.2 Norway: lynx compensation*

- Outside of the EU, the Norwegian Government provides compensation to livestock farmers and domestic reindeer herd owners for losses arising from lynx predation. Some livestock farmers are not satisfied with this payment as some may lose >30% of their herd to lynx attacks and would rather see a reduction in the lynx population due to the loss of genetically valuable stock as well as the emotional pressure resulting from the losses. Winter hunting permits are granted each year; however, instances of problem animals can result in summer permits being provided.

*8.5.3 Germany: lynx compensation*

- In Germany, the state is not liable for damage caused by wild animals. However, a voluntary compensation fund exists to compensate verifiable predation by large carnivores (i.e. lynx, wolf and bear) on livestock. Funded by four Non-Governmental Organisations (15%) and by the Bavarian Nature Conservation Fund (NCF, 85%). Claims for damage are handled by the BayLfU (Bavarian Agency of Environment, 3Lynx project partner) with the help of the voluntary Large Carnivore network and veterinary offices.
- The verification of a lynx attack on livestock requires an on-site investigation and documentation of the dead animal and surroundings; followed by an autopsy at a veterinary office; resulting in the consolidation of first and second investigation by an expert which evaluates if all evidence found qualifies as a lynx attack. If a large carnivore attack can be verified, the compensation fund pays an amount which was or will be specified by the Bavarian Agency of Agriculture.

8.6 The above examples include instances where policy has implemented compensation schemes for crop damages or the loss of livestock. While compensation is welcome if damages are suffered, Government's approach should follow the mitigation hierarchy to ensure that the right policy and strategy are in place to minimise the need for compensation. Compensation schemes are complex, it can be difficult to prove whether the species concerned has killed a farm animal and in some cases that many farmers don't claim.

8.7 While species reintroduction lessons and learnings must be taken into consideration by Government and can be used to inform project stakeholder engagement, it is important to remember that Great Britain is an island with multiple unique ecosystems. Its geographical size, climate, population, infrastructure, and farming systems will be different to Europe. The suitability of England for a species and/or how its managed will differ and must be carefully considered by Government.