

Natural England – Wildlife Management & Licensing Service

Outline criteria for consideration of species reintroduction licence applications – DRAFT February 2010

Section 14(1) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence for any person to release or allow to escape into the wild any animal which;

- a) is of a kind which is not ordinarily resident in and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state; or
- b) is included in Part I of Schedule 9.

This includes former native species which are now extinct in the wild in this country and native species listed in Schedule 9, which may be present in some parts of the country but may, nevertheless, be the subject of potential proposals to augment populations or for reintroduction to parts of the country where they are currently absent.

Under section 16(4) of the Act licences can be issued to allow the release of animals that would otherwise be an offence under section 14. This licensing function is carried out by Natural England on behalf of the Secretary of State (Defra).

Applications for reintroductions of former native species 'into the wild' in the wider countryside are considered, amongst other things, against the criteria in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Guidelines for Reintroductions – these can be found on their website: http://www.iucnsscrg.org/policy_guidelines.html . Licences will normally only be issued if Natural England is satisfied that the release will not lead to significant negative impacts on biodiversity or socio-economic interests. If there are justified concerns about possible impacts, consideration may be given to allowing a limited 'trial' release (see below).

The main criteria and evidence required by Natural England to assess such applications can be summarised as follows:

1. The release or reintroduction must have a neutral or beneficial impact on biodiversity and socio-economic interests.
2. In the case of reintroductions of formerly native species into the wider countryside applications should be accompanied by;
 - a) **Feasibility Report:** this should include, for example, the overall project outline, the conservation case for undertaking the project, the rationale for selection of source animals, habitat suitability assessment and selection, population viability assessment and monitoring proposals. The Feasibility Report should make reference to and highlight lessons learnt from previous reintroductions of the same or similar species, where available;
 - b) **Conservation Case:** this should show how the release will contribute to the conservation of the species concerned, or to the restoration of habitats or ecological function at the release site. Any reasonable differences of approach to the species' conservation which might conflict with the proposal should be addressed. This may form part of the Feasibility Report;

- c) **Impacts Assessment:** this should be an evidence-based assessment of potential impacts which, if a licence is to be issued, must demonstrate that the release will not have a significant adverse impact on natural/semi-natural habitats, native wildlife or socio-economic interests;
 - d) **Public Opinion/Stakeholder Consultation:** a statistically valid public and/or stakeholder consultation will normally be required (depending on the nature of the reintroduction and species concerned). Unless a significant balance of public support in favour of the project can be demonstrated it is unlikely that a licence will be issued, and;
 - e) **Contingency Plan** (see below): this should set out, where appropriate, contingency proposals for practical measures for dealing with unforeseen damage or problem individuals and an exit strategy which, if necessary, can be implemented to terminate the project.
3. In all cases, a disease risk assessment must be carried out and the project should present no significant disease concerns.
 4. In addition, consideration should be given to the impact of the project on the welfare of the individual animals or on source populations involved and evidence of any necessary Veterinary authority or permits for the acquisition of animals from the source population/country must be provided.

Contingency planning

A reintroduction/release project proposal will be expected to include specific provision for dealing with problem individuals. Proposals for mitigation measures should not place an undue burden of proof on a complainant and any body established by the project to assess complaints needs to be genuinely independent and give due weight to a complainant's interests.

A clear statement of an exit strategy is required in the project proposal and, in the case of projects involving a number of partners, all partners need to have 'signed up' to this before a licence can be issued.

An exit strategy is expected to include, for example:

- Broad stepwise criteria for moving from mitigation options, to removal of problem individuals, to termination of the project;
- Proposed constitution of an independent decision-making body for the above process;
- Summary of practical methods and techniques that will be used in event of removal/necessary implementation of exit strategy;
- Proposed provision of necessary equipment, facilities and resources; and
- Who will be responsible for implementation.

Trial Release

Where a licence to release is being considered but concerns about potential impacts remain, the preferred option is for a trial release involving a relatively small number of individuals and limited potential for post-release dispersal. This will:

- Limit the absolute potential for negative impact;

- Limit the likely cost of mitigation;
- Provide an opportunity to monitor real impacts in the release area, and;
- Reduce the cost and maximise the chance of successfully implementing the exit strategy, should this prove necessary.

The number of individuals that can be released in a trial release will be determined by how easily the project could be terminated and animals recaptured/removed, if necessary. This will depend on the species' biology, mitigation methods, 'trapability' etc.

A trial release, as far as practicable, should be into an area where natural boundaries limit the species' dispersal potential and, where possible, should include provision for recapture/removal of individuals that stray beyond the trial area.

Monitoring

All release projects should make provision for sufficient monitoring to determine the level of impacts arising from the project and any licensed 'trial period' should be of sufficient duration to allow conclusions to be drawn about such impacts before a decision is made on licensing any wider/larger-scale release programme.

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