



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

From the Secretary of State for Environment, Food
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Dr Paul O'Donoghue
Lynx UK Trust
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102 Bowen Court,
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30th November 2018

Dear Dr O'Donoghue,

Thank you for your licence application to Natural England to release six Eurasian Lynx into Kielder Forest. We met and discussed this on 19th February this year and I have taken great interest in this project and in reintroductions of formerly native species in England as a whole. In the light of this, and the significance of this proposal, I decided to take this decision myself.

I am therefore writing to you to inform you that I have accepted Natural England's advice and decided not to grant a licence for this proposal. Following a thorough assessment, Natural England concluded that the application does not meet the necessary standards set out in the IUCN guidelines and fails to give confidence that the project could be completed in practical terms or that the outputs would meet the stated aims. As a result Natural England found that the proposal lacked the necessary depth and rigour to provide confidence it would succeed.

NE had particular concerns in a number of areas of the proposal. Firstly with regard to the overall feasibility, and as detailed in Section 4 of the advice, NE found that the project lacked organisational resilience and did not sufficiently evidence a securely held budget. In this regard it was not clear how this proposal would be funded, including how an exit strategy would be executed in an appropriate manner. NE also had concerns about the reliance on volunteers and insufficient project team contingency, as well as the lack of formal partnerships or collaborations with other relevant organisations that would normally be expected.

Significantly, as highlighted in Section 5 of the advice, the proposal did not include an ecological impact assessment and therefore the application lacked the assurances that impacts had been considered or that the area had been properly assessed as suitable for the lynx at the current time.

As far as could be seen, major landowners and managers, including Forestry Commission England, were either engaged insufficiently or not at all. As key enablers to the project, this is concerning as their support would have provided reassurance about its potential success. In addition, as outlined in Section 6 of NE's advice, the proposal did not

demonstrate sufficient local support for the project and the socio-economic benefits of the trial were unclear. The lack of demonstrated local buy-in also fails to show how the risk of persecution of animals had been managed down to an acceptable level.

Finally, I noted that NE found it was not clear how the trial would provide evidence to enable a decision on a full reintroduction as there was no coherent plan in place for monitoring lynx or impacts on other species, habitats or humans.

In light of the clear recommendation from NE, I have decided not to approve this reintroduction. I understand that this news will be disappointing to you, and I would like to assure you that the government remains committed to providing opportunities for the reintroduction of formerly native species, as outlined in the 25 Year Environment Plan, where proposals are comprehensive and there are clear environmental and socio-economic benefits.

Kielder Forest is an area where the Forest Commission has been taking action to manage and restore important habitats and ecosystem functions to enhance biodiversity. This has included the release of hundreds of water voles and the removal of mink from the Tyne and monitoring the return and spread of pine martens to understand options for their recovery. The area has also seen significant recolonisation by a number of bird species as a result of continued efforts, all of which is positive news. I hope that you can support the need to undertake species reintroductions in a considered manner that can positively contribute to the ecosystem dynamics of the area and ensure that the maximum benefits are gained for both the local environment and those who use and enjoy it.

For your information, I attach Natural England's advice that I received regarding your licence application, which I will also be publishing on GOV.UK, in light of the evident public interest.

With every good wish,

Michael Gove