

Update on the Escaped Beavers in Devon: Meeting on Friday 25th April 2014

Present: [REDACTED] (Chair); [REDACTED] (Defra Zoonoses); [REDACTED] (Defra Exotics); [REDACTED] (Exotics Legal); [REDACTED] (Wildlife Legal), [REDACTED] (Wildlife Legal); [REDACTED] (Defra Biodiversity) [REDACTED] (NE); [REDACTED] (NE); [REDACTED] (AHVLA Import Risks); [REDACTED] (Defra Imports / EU Trade); [REDACTED] (Defra Comms) & [REDACTED] (AHVLA Comms).

Quick summary of situation – three beavers living free in Devon, there is a non-negligible risk of them harbouring *Echinococcus multilocularis* (EM) and that if they were to die they could be scavenged and put UK's disease free status at risk. Preferred way forward is to capture and return to safe environment.

This is not just a disease risk – this is a biodiversity risk and reputational risk (rule of law and policy position that reintroduction of formerly native species should not be released at will).

At present, legal powers do not allow us to simply kill them. If the owner allows us to capture them, there is no requirement to use alternative legislation; however there is more than one landowner of the river bank where the beavers have their territory,

PH side: Zoonosis Monitoring Legislation allows us to capture the animals and look for disease, but we cannot capture them and then do nothing about looking for disease. The best diagnostic test would be a post mortem examination but there is no specific power to kill under this LEX. Natural England agreed that we can capture to test for disease.

If the beavers are captured and undergo a non-lethal test – this would fulfil the ascertaining disease requirement. The tests are not perfect and false negatives may occur, but even if they are putatively negative, they cannot not be re-released as that is illegal.

There are no wildlife Legs which enable us to enforce capture. No licence is needed to keep beavers, unless they caught from wild (Conservation Habitats and Species Regs Annex 4 species) – therefore a licence will be needed to keep the beavers once they are caught. Wildlife and Countryside Act makes it illegal to release into wild.

If the owners will not let us on the land to capture, under the Zoonosis Monitoring Reg, we could request a magistrates warrant.

Landowner: Only one consenting landlord is needed to set up traps. If we remove the beavers and the landowners are unhappy, they may have a public law challenge but not a private law challenge.

Questions arose around the ability to dart the animals rather than trapping and the diagnostic tests.

It was agreed that:

- The Policy lead is Defra – shared between Exotics and Non-native / protected animal species.
- Trapping should be done by the AHVLA Wildlife team who have the experience.
- We need to contract someone and funding needs to come from the two lead policy teams. Costs of such a project may be as high as £50 k.
- [REDACTED].
- Meanwhile we will attempt a diagnosis and will make a decision on that basis about killing them.
- Need to understand whether the season has an impact on welfare issue about trapping in case there are beaver kits.

Action for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to look at a co-funding arrangement for these costs.

Action [REDACTED] to contact the AHVLA wildlife team next week about the likelihood of them doing the work; what they would propose; who would approach the landowner; check if there is a written agreement already in the process; consider where to put the beavers once captured. Estimates of costs.

Action NE has already spoken to the landowner and a joint approach should now be made with AHVLA. Agreement in writing is needed – a draft letter (AHVLA should have a template) should be provided for landowner to sign.

Action AHVLA wildlife team should be asked about finding a secure site for rehoming (not thought to be a problem).

We are soon bringing in orders about killing invasives without landowners consent and we don't want this to interfere reputationally with that legislation's progress.

Action: AHVLA and Defra Comms to agree some media lines as well.

Action: [REDACTED] to ask wildlife team about a fall-back position if we fail to capture and how long we attempt it.

Action: [REDACTED] to find out more about other methods for capture – darting etc from the Scotland team and zoo liaison committee

The likely costs of recapturing the Beavers currently in the wild on the River Otter (preliminary discussions with wildlife team):

AHVLA Wildlife team are going to provide a more detailed proposal. In the interim they estimate that the recapture and testing of these animals will cost in the region of £20k -

£50k depending to a significant degree on how long it will take to trap these animals (small populations of any species are notoriously hard to catch).

This rough estimate includes –

- Trapping (over [REDACTED] period) including obtaining consents etc. An operative will need to be available to check the traps daily. The possibility of using landowners to check was raised, and this is not an option mainly due to reliability but also because an operative will need to remove any captured beavers/and or release any non-target animals.
- Housing the animals for testing. If it proves necessary to build temporary accommodation this will increase costs
- Testing using ultrasound. They are also going to look at options for genetically? testing provenance of beavers if we wish to look at this.
- Rehoming of the animals

Next meeting after [REDACTED]'s meeting with AHVLA, receipt of more detailed proposal from Wildlife team.