Institute of Fisheries Management

Policy Position Statement

Reintroduction of the European Beaver

Purpose

The Institute of Fisheries Management understands the desire to reintroduce the European beaver, a keystone species that was once native to Great Britain. We believe that this should only occur as part of a strategic assessment of environmental benefits and risks.

Beavers are important ecosystem engineers and can bring about benefits in the right environment, including markedly increasing local biodiversity, improved water quality and reduced downstream flood risk. However, their activities can result in damage to agriculture and forestry as well as cause localised flooding and erosion. In addition, their dams can block access for fish species migrating to upstream spawning grounds.

The Institute supports the continued research taking place at existing licensed introduction sites.

IFM calls for

- European Beaver only to be introduced to designated areas following thorough assessment of environmental benefits and risks.
- A system of veterinary quarantine to be put in place before release, to prevent the spread of diseases and parasites.
- Strict enforcement action against anyone who illegally introduces European beavers.
- Prohibition on introduction to rivers where the risk assessment identifies that their dams have the potential to significantly damage migratory fisheries, notably those for salmon and sea trout.
- Clear guidance on what constitutes significant damage and sustainable management.
- A clear understanding on who is responsible for funded population management of introduced European beaver.
- Increased research on the impacts of beaver on fish in British rivers.

Institute of Fisheries Management. PO Box 679, Hull, HU5 9AX
E.Mail info@ifm.org.uk. - Call. 0845 3887012.- www.ifm.org.uk

The IFM is the only independent professional body representing fisheries professionals in the UK. Founded in 1969 our members come from across the fisheries sector.

Background

European beaver is a keystone species that was once native to Britain and it is significant that it is being re-introduced to the British Isles after an absence of over 300 years. This contributes to some of the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive and there are biodiversity and water quality benefits seen in areas inhabited by beavers.

Managed wild populations are now present at Knapdale and Tayside in Scotland and on the River Otter, Devon, England. The Scottish government has recently decided to grant protected status to the existing Scottish beaver populations. Further reintroductions are likely in the short to medium term to secure the stability of the beaver in Scotland.

Many fish species would have co-existed with beaver for millennia prior to their extinction in Britain. Their role in ecosystem engineering has been shown to benefit flood prevention through increased flow regulation. However, they can also cause damage to agriculture, forestry, to river banks and contribute to localised flooding. It is also recognized that social, economic and conservation damage to salmon and sea trout fisheries is a concern. Much private and public money has been spent in recent times trying to improve connectivity for migratory fish in England and Wales. Whilst there may be benefits to upland and wilderness areas there is likely to be significant negative impacts if beaver colonise populated areas.