

Reintroduction of the European Beaver

Purpose

The Institute of Fisheries Management understands the desire to reintroduce the European beaver, a keystone species, to Great Britain but believes that this should only occur as part of a strategic assessment of environmental benefits and risks. The Institute supports the continued research taking place at existing licensed introduction sites. The Scottish government has recently decided to give beavers protected status in the existing Scottish populations. Further reintroductions are likely in the short to medium term to secure the stability of beaver population in Scotland.

IFM calls for

- European Beaver only to be introduced to designated areas following thorough assessment of environmental benefits and risks.
- There must be veterinary quarantine in place before release, to prevent the spread of diseases and parasites
- Strict legal enforcement action against anyone who illegally introduces European beavers.
- There should be clear guidance on what constitutes significant damage and what management can be undertaken as beavers spread out of their designated release areas.
- Clear guidance on who is responsible for funded population management of introduced European beaver to prevent serious damage to property and fisheries.
- They should not be introduced to rivers where their dams may damage migratory fisheries, notably those for salmonids (salmon and sea trout)
- There should be more funded research on the impacts of beaver on fish in British rivers, notably on upstream and downstream migration of fish and on the habitats that the fish need to complete their life cycles.

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 are a keystone species that were once native to Britain and it is exciting that they are being re-introduced to the country in a controlled, managed fashion. This helps meet some of the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive and there are biodiversity and water quality benefits seen in areas colonised by beavers. Managed wild populations are now present at Knapdale, Argyll and in Tayside in Scotland and on the River Otter in Devon, England. Many fish species would have co-existed with beaver for millennia prior to their extinction in Britain about five hundred years ago. Beavers are important ecosystem engineers and can bring about many ecosystem benefits in the right environment including markedly increasing local biodiversity. This fits in well with current view of ecosystem engineering for flood prevention. However, they can also cause damage to agriculture, forestry, to river banks and contribute to localised flooding. Their dams can block access for migratory fisheries, notably those for salmonids (salmon and sea trout) and access to the upstream spawning grounds of river fish. 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.

