

Report on the Consultation of the Beavers in Scotland – Strategic Environment Assessment Environmental Report

Analysis of Responses

June 2018



October 2018

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Executive Summary

Introduction and Background

The purpose of this consultation was to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to provide feedback on the policy decision to reintroduce beavers to Scotland and whether appropriate mitigation measures have been identified. Additionally, individuals were also able to comment on the Beavers in Scotland - Strategic Environmental Assessment, which was published 12 December 2017.

Aims & Objective

The aim of this report was to summarise the responses to the consultation on whether the Beavers in Scotland - Strategic Environmental Assessment had correctly identified the potential impacts and appropriate mitigation of beavers in Scotland.

The objective of this report is to summarise the consultation responses, suggestions, and comments relevant to the review of Beavers in Scotland - Strategic Environmental Assessment.

About the Consultation

The consultation was produced by the Scottish Government and was sent to a number of stakeholders through the Scottish Beaver Forum. It was also made available on the Scottish Government website at <https://consult.gov.scot/forestry/beavers-in-scotland/> and advertised in the Edinburgh Gazette.

The consultation opened on 12 December 2017 and closed on 6 March 2018.

The consultation received 533 responses to the consultation. The majority of respondents were individuals (494) as well as key stakeholder organisations (39).

Analysis of Responses

Responses received were analysed to see whether the Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report had correctly identified potential impacts and appropriate mitigation measures regarding the reintroduction of beavers to Scotland.

The majority of respondents (83%) agreed with the reintroduction policy and were content that appropriate mitigation measures have been identified. However, there were some (mostly land managers) who noted that in order for the mitigation measures to work long-term funding and a management framework will be required.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Background

Policy Background

Scottish Ministers announced on 24 November 2016 that the beaver populations in Knapdale in Argyll and in the Tay and Earn catchments could remain in Scotland subject to satisfactory completion of a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

The Assessment found that beavers will have a significant impact on certain areas, such as agriculture, waterways, forestry, and infrastructure. These impacts will be concentrated in the Tayside area, associated with higher population densities than Knapdale, and the greater intensity of land-use. The potential significant impacts will include flooding through damage caused to field drainage systems and the undermining of flood defences, and damage to infrastructure and crops. The SEA highlights that mitigation measures as currently used in other countries, and also those currently subject to trial work in Scotland, could be satisfactorily applied to avoid significant adverse effects.

Under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, the SEA process requires that the Assessment is put out for public consultation. This consultation was not whether or not beavers should remain in Scotland, but rather a consultation on whether the assessment had correctly identified potential impacts and appropriate mitigation.

Beavers, initially widespread throughout Britain, were last recorded in Scotland in the 16th century. Consideration of the feasibility and desirability of reintroducing beavers to Scotland started in 1995 and culminated in the 'Beavers in Scotland' (BiS) report produced by Scottish Natural Heritage on behalf of the Scottish Government and published in June 2015.

Following completion of the Scottish Beaver Trial at Knapdale, the work of the Tayside Beaver Study Group and related projects and initiatives, Scottish Ministers are minded to allow beavers to remain in Scotland.

Scottish Ministers agreed that:

- Beaver populations in Argyll and Tayside can remain
- The species will receive legal protection, in accordance with the *EU Habitats Directive*
- Beavers will be allowed to expand their range naturally
- Beavers should be actively managed to minimise adverse impacts on farmers and other land owners
- It will remain an offence for beavers to be released without a licence, punishable by up to 2 years imprisonment and an unlimited fine

About the Consultation

The consultation sought the views on the Beavers in Scotland - Strategic Environmental Assessment through the following five questions:

Question 1: Do you agree with the reintroduction policy and that the Environmental Report has correctly identified the potential impacts and appropriate mitigation?

Question 2: What are your views on the evidence set out in the Environmental Report that has been used to inform the assessment process?

Question 3: What are your views on the predicted environmental effects as set out in the Environmental Report? See page 15 and Section 4.

Question 4: Are there any other environmental effects that have not been considered?

Question 5: Please provide any other comments you have on the Environmental Report.

Chapter 2. Analysis of Responses

Number of Responses

The Scottish Government received 533 responses to this consultation, both from organisations (39) and individuals (494). The organisations included a range of stakeholders including 20 countryside management and representative bodies, 19 charities/campaign groups and a large number of individuals from across Scotland.

Copies of the responses can be found here https://consult.gov.scot/forestry/beavers-in-scotland/consultation/published_select_respondent

Non-Departmental Public Bodies that responded included Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority and Scottish Water.

Two local authorities also responded, Angus Council and Clackmannanshire Council through the Clackmannanshire Biodiversity Partnership.

Other respondents included Trees for Life, Scottish Wild Beaver Group, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, and the Scottish Association for Country Sports

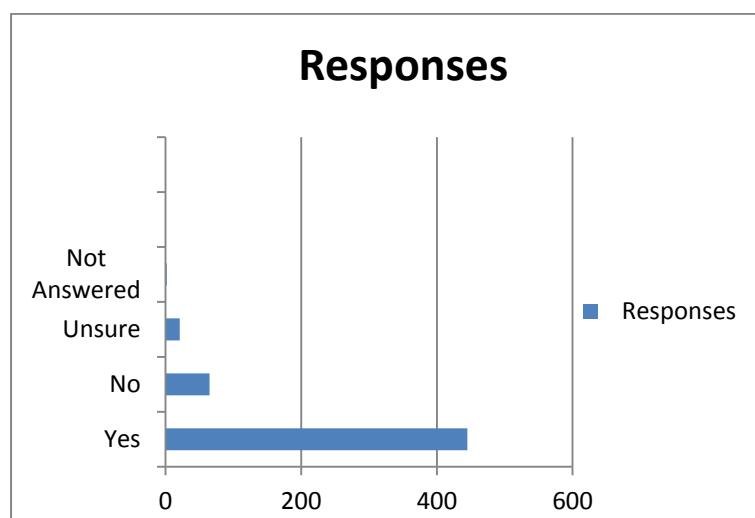
We were aware of one public campaign related to the consultation organised by “Save the Free Beavers of the Tay” who posted a template response on their public Facebook page which encouraged their members to use this when responding to the consultation.

Consultation Questions

Questions 1-3 were multiple choice questions and almost every respondent provided an answer (between 99-100%), however when asked for further information to explain their response there was a considerable drop in response. This may explain why there was also a drop in response for questions 4 and 5 (62% and 61% respectively), which don't not involve a multiple choice question. Therefore the number of respondents providing detailed information was relatively consistent for each question.

Question 1: Do you agree with the reintroduction policy and that the Environmental Report has correctly identified the potential impacts and appropriate mitigation? See Sections 4 and 5 respectively.

Number of Responses to this Question – 533 (100%)



Option	Responses	Percentage of All
Yes	445	83%
No	65	12%
Unsure	21	4%
Not Answered	2	1%

Respondents were also asked to explain their answer.

There were 392 responses to this part of the question.

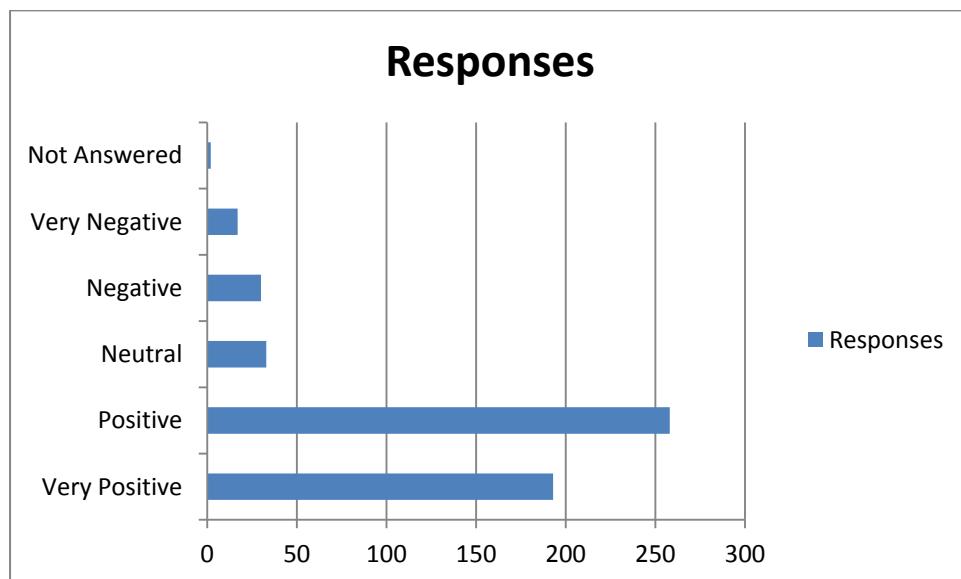
Comments Summary

- The majority of responses agreed with the reintroduction policy and that beaver populations in Scotland should be allowed to remain, and that they should receive strong legal protection.

- This was mainly because of the benefits they provide such as flood risk reduction, improved water quality and increased biodiversity. In addition, their presence has socio-economic benefits (e.g. ecotourism).
- There were a number of individuals who suggested that the reintroduction policy should be extended to wider areas of Scotland in order to ensure the return of natural ecosystems and the potential benefits they can provide, such as flood prevention.
- The main concern among those who disagreed with the reintroduction policy was whether there will be long-term funding and a management framework for the mitigation measures to support farmers and land managers prevent serious damage to land uses (agriculture, forestry & fisheries).
- Additionally, a number of farmers and land managers thought that the impacts of the reintroduction policy had been underestimated within the report and that the arable land in Tayside will be considerably affected by potential drain blocking and flooding caused by beavers.
- There were a number of individuals who noted that as there are no longer any natural beaver predators in Scotland, such as wolves or bears, then there will be some circumstances when beaver management will be required.

Question 2: What are your views on the evidence set out in the Environmental Report that has been used to inform the assessment process?

Number of Responses to this Question – 531 (99%)



Option	Responses	Percentage of All
Very Positive	193	36%
Positive	258	48%
Neutral	33	6%
Negative	30	6%
Very Negative	17	3%
Not Answered	2	1%

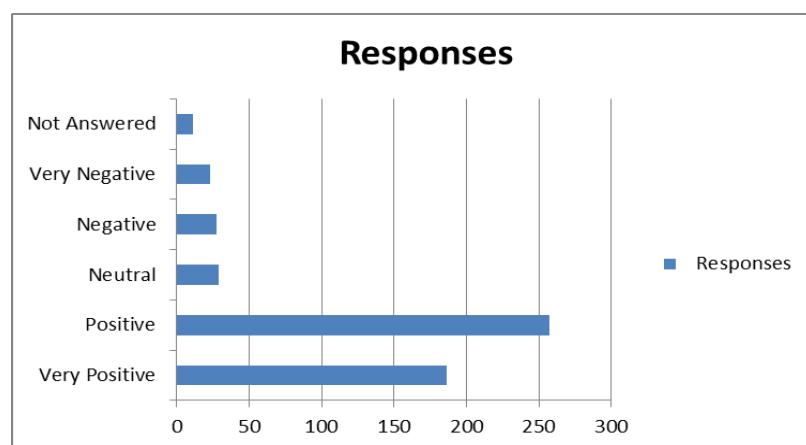
Respondents were also asked to give details of additional relevant sources.

There were 247 responses to this part of the question.

Comments Summary

- The majority of the respondents to this question agreed that the evidence contained in the Environmental Report was generally comprehensive, detailed, and thorough.
- A few respondents raised concerns that the SEA did not cover the impact beavers would have on migratory fish, and did not fully consider the damage they caused and who would fund the associated costs.
- A number of individuals stated that further research was required on the impact the reintroduction policy could have on riparian woodland areas.
- One individual suggested using the example of how beaver wetland buffer zones have been used in the Netherlands as a potential mitigation measure for this damage, particularly the effects of pollution caused by agricultural run-off.

Question 3: What are your views on the predicted environmental effects as set out in the Environmental Report?



Number of Responses to this Question – 530 (99%)

Option	Responses	Percentage of All
Very Positive	186	35%
Positive	257	48%
Neutral	29	5%
Negative	27	5%
Very Negative	23	4%
Not Answered	11	2%

Respondents were also asked to explain their answer.

There were 333 responses to this part of the question.

Comments Summary

- The majority of people had positive or very positive views on the predicted environmental effects set out in the report, with many stating that they thought the findings in the report were “comprehensive and well-reasoned”.
- However, there are some who are still concerned about the long term affects the reintroduction policy will have on land uses including agriculture and fisheries, and are not convinced there are appropriate mitigation measures in place to prevent serious damage.
- A number of individuals suggested that the overall effect on biodiversity, particularly habitat availability, will be positive.

Question 4: Are there any other environmental effects that have not been considered?

Number of Responses to this Question – 332 (62%)

Comments Summary

- 87 out of the 332 respondents to this question thought that the creation of riparian buffer zones with beaver wetlands could provide a critical solution for the reduction of agricultural run-off in intensely farmed areas.
- A few respondents thought that the environmental impacts on migratory fish and fisheries had not been considered sufficiently in the SEA report.
- A small number of respondents raised concerns that the report did not cover the potential issues surrounding the spread of non-native plant species through the beavers foraging and dam building activities.
- A number of land managers suggested that the spread of invasive non-native plant species due to beaver activity, including foraging and dam building, requires further analysis.

Question 5: Please provide any other comments you have on the Environmental Report.

Number of Responses to this Question – 325 (61%)

Comments Summary:

- The majority of people were content with the Environmental Report and were happy that it had “correctly identified the potential impacts of beavers and appropriate mitigation measures”.
- Additionally, a number of people highlighted the need for “sufficient funding to be made available for management of beavers” and for “any wildlife crime to be swiftly investigated and prosecuted”.
- Those who are not content with the Environmental Report believe that more research is required in order to fully understand the long term effects the policy may have on various land uses, and that the damage already caused in the Tayside area has been underestimated.
- One individual suggested that a socio-economic analysis should be completed to then be combined with the environmental assessment in order to provide a wider context of the potential impacts of the reintroduction policy.



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