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**JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

**BIOLOGICAL TRANSLOCATIONS POLICY**

**Paper by Dr Ian McLean**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This paper reports on progress with the development and publication of the statutory agencies' policy on biological translocations and on related developments in this field. A consultation draft of the paper *Biological Translocations: a Conservation Policy for Britain* was issued in August 2001 to previous Government consultees, to members of the DEFRA Review of Non-native Species Policy, and to selected NGOs. The paper was also placed on the JNCC web site with an estimated 300 downloads of the text taking place during the consultation period. Responses from 25 organisations and individuals were received by the closing date at the end of 31 October 2001, or shortly afterwards. The views received have been collated and circulated to the Inter-agency Translocations Working Group (Prof. Bill Heal, Dr Mike Howe (CCW), Dr Roger Mitchell (EN) and Dr Andy Douse (SNH)), which considered these responses on 21 November 2001. At this meeting, the Working Group discussed the options for publishing the policy in the light of the views received and progress with other related initiatives.
- 1.2 In addition to the consultation responses received, *Biological Translocations: a Conservation Policy for Britain* has been referred to and used within the DEFRA Review of Non-native Species Policy. This Review began in Summer 2001 and has a Main Group (with representatives from the statutory conservation agencies) supported by three Sub-groups. These are a Prevention Sub-group (chair Dr Ian McLean, JNCC), Monitoring and Risk Assessment Sub-group (chair Dr Ian Bainbridge, Scottish Executive, Edinburgh) and Remedy and Control Sub-group (chair Dr Pete Robertson, Central Science Laboratory, York). The DEFRA Review Group is due to report in 2002 and will be of major importance in determining future policy and practice for non-native species in Britain.

## 2. The Consultation Responses Received

2.1 The responses were generally positive and welcomed the preparation of the policy and the opportunity to comment on its contents. Apart from minor revisions of specific matters which do not alter the scope or content significantly, the more important matters raised were as follows:

- i. there were some comments on the relationship between the first section *Biological Translocations: a Conservation Policy for Britain* that deals with non-native species and the DEFRA Review of Non-native Species Policy. These comments indicated the need for the DEFRA Review to deal with translocation of non-native species (including the translocation of native species beyond their native range), with respect to overall policy, possible new measures (including legislation) and future management of these issues;
- ii. a second general comment was that the policy is weaker on marine and freshwater issues, with an emphasis upon terrestrial aspects of translocations. This will need some additional work, involving appropriate statutory agency specialists, to prepare more even coverage;
- iii. more detail was also requested on the implications of genetic variation and diversity within species for translocation policy. This is more problematical because interpretation of the science is more controversial here and it may not be possible to analyse the policy implications in greater depth. Future revisions of the policy may be able to deal more thoroughly with aspects such as the use of local provenance sources for ecological restoration projects;
- iv. more recognition of the importance of climate change was suggested by some consultees. On the other hand, some respondents felt that the consultation draft attempted to cover too many aspects and that dividing the policy into separate, more specific sections would help with targeting the advice more clearly.

2.2 Other points raised by some respondents included:

- i. the value of Codes of Practice as an appropriate way of defining practical policies for individual organisations or taxonomic groups;
- ii. the importance of documenting evidence to clarify the effectiveness of different policies and practices and of enhancing the scientific basis for policies;
- iii. support for the establishment of an overall body to provide advice, assist in rapid decision-making and assess consequences of options - with uncertainty of the role of ACRE in wider aspects than GMOs;

- iv. the ecological and practical importance to relating UK policies to those of neighbouring countries and the EU.

In sub-section 2.3 below, the responses are summarised under the three main headings used in the consultation draft, a number of more specific responses are summarised in the context where they are particularly relevant.

- 2.3 **Translocation of non-native species into Britain:** the emphasis in *Biological Translocations: a Conservation Policy for Britain* on preventing the arrival and establishment of invasive non-native species, and the need for better co-ordinated action to deal with problem species, was strongly supported and endorsed. Some responses drew attention to the DEFRA Review as the best forum for addressing these issues from here onwards. The use of codes of conduct to implement more effective prevention measures in different sectors was mentioned.
- 2.4 **Translocation of native species in Britain:** this section of *Biological Translocations: a Conservation Policy for Britain* comprises the policy and practice for conservation-related translocations. The use of the IUCN Guidelines was supported as was the process for evaluating and undertaking species translocations for conservation purposes. Some specific improvements regarding points of detail, and the need for a process to deal with more complex and controversial proposals, also emerged from the consultation exercise. The need for clear policy guidance is generally acknowledged, given the prominence of species translocations to assist species recovery under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 2.5 **Translocation of habitats in Britain:** there was strong support for the firm line in *Biological Translocations: a Conservation Policy for Britain* opposing habitat translocations that are carried out to "rescue" conservation sites from development. Attempts to compensate for the loss of ancient habitats through translocations are widely regarded as untenable and should be dealt with separately from other kinds of habitat translocations. Thus, the use of habitat translocations to assist with ecological restoration or habitat re-creation (where the donor habitats are not removed or damaged significantly) should be the subject of separate guidance in future.

### 3. **Recommended next steps**

- 3.1 **Non-native species:** it is recommended that JNCC and the country agencies continue to use the draft policy for the DEFRA Review, together with other material, to assist with the preparation of the final report. The DEFRA Review of Non-native Species Policy is the major opportunity for establishing new and more effective policy and practice in this area. It is felt inappropriate to publish this part of *Biological Translocations: a Conservation Policy for Britain* while the DEFRA Review is in progress and developing both policy and practice further in this area. The statutory conservation agencies should continue to participate actively in the DEFRA Review, together with other stakeholders, so that the final report is as comprehensive as possible. The role

and remit of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE), which deals with both GMOs and non-native species, needs to be examined with regard to the introduction of non-native species.

- 3.2 **Translocations for conservation purposes:** it is recommended that JNCC publish this advice as a separate document after revision by the Inter-agency Translocations Working Group in the early part of 2002. The advice should set out options for a process to take decisions in accordance with the policy (taking into account the existing groups involved, such as the Chief Scientists, UKBAP SAPs, and the operational responsibilities of Country Agencies). The translocation of native species beyond their existing range is within the terms of reference for the DEFRA Review, and so dealing with the problems posed by the arrival of predators, such as hedgehogs on offshore islands, will be dealt with in that forum.
- 3.3 **Habitat translocations:** it is recommended that the advice should be clarified where needed and then published as a separate policy document after revisions by the Inter-agency Translocations Working Group in the early part of 2002. The content would be very similar to the present section of the policy, although the document would need to be re-structured for it to be used as a stand-alone paper.