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Diverse group call for long-term plan for England's beavers

- **Government asked to allow wild beaver populations to remain and expand naturally in England**
- **Beavers should be recognised as native and given appropriate legal status**
- **Robust national management framework with funding and local support is required**
- **Licensed releases including from enclosures should be planned on suitable river catchments**
- **Government asked for a timeline to agree a beaver restoration plan with a 25 year vision**

The Government should allow wild beavers to remain in England and expand naturally through river catchments, with robust local management and monitoring of the animals, say members of a coalition of diverse organisations.

The call for an English Beaver Strategy – a long-term plan for restoring beaver populations in the country – follows the UK Government's groundbreaking decision earlier this month that England's first breeding population of beavers for 400 years could remain in the River Otter in Devon, after a trial that highlighted how beavers benefit people and wildlife.

The wide-ranging English Beaver Strategy Working Group – made up of 39 organisations including NFU, CLA, Wild Trout Trust, Thames Water, National Trust and RSPB, gathered together by the small charity Beaver Trust to form a consensus on the future of beavers in England – sent [proposals for an English Beaver Strategy](#) to Defra and Natural England on 14 August.

Although not everyone in the Working Group can support the detailed proposals for restoring beavers, all agree collaboration is the key – and a long-term plan for beavers is essential. This follows two months of engagement and represents a major step forward after Defra's news on 6 August that beavers on the River Otter may remain.

James Wallace, Director of Beaver Trust and convenor of the English Beaver Strategy Working Group, said: "It is critical for people with different views to collaborate on how to co-exist with beavers. These ecosystem engineers could help us tackle issues across river catchments like water security, floods, pollution and loss of wildlife. Beavers can help improve our lives and livelihoods, and their wetlands reconnect people with the rest of nature.

"Like beavers, this collaboration is a symbol of hope in challenging and often polarised times. Understandably, some people are concerned about beavers returning to heavily-managed land and rivers. We recognise the need to help mitigate risks of negative impacts on farmland, watercourses and infrastructure – and so we are convening diverse interest groups to create a strategy that works for everyone. The trick with beavers is to start early, raise awareness, engage communities and ensure funding and local support are in place well before they return."

Members of the group are asking the Government to recognise beavers as native with appropriate legal status in England and to ensure safeguards enable timely, responsible and effective management and their reintegration into the landscape.

The Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) co-evolved in Britain with other native wildlife such as fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and invertebrates. It is listed as 'Critically Endangered' in England on the IUCN-compliant Red List. The beaver is a European Protected Species (EPS) in Europe under the EU Habitats Directive. EPS status was given to beavers in Scotland in 2019 and allows licensed management including translocation, dam removal and lethal control. England can learn from other countries how to achieve the right balance.

A properly-resourced national management framework is needed with public and private funding and locally-led community support to help people live alongside beavers again, says the group.

Led by Devon Wildlife Trust, the River Otter Beaver Trial resulted in the publication of a [Science and Evidence Report](#) and [Beaver Management Strategy Framework](#) using a hierarchy of increasing impact starting with education, risk avoidance, mitigation, then trapping and relocation, and finally lethal control.

Harry Barton, CEO of Devon Wildlife Trust, said: "The River Otter Beaver Trial has shown that beavers can thrive in the wild in England and that they and local communities can co-exist very well in a managed and productive landscape. It has also shown how potential benefits can be maximised and conflicts managed through engagement, landowner advice and support. This groundbreaking work should now form the basis of a national strategy and management framework so that communities across the country can benefit from these amazing animals. Partnership is the key to success, and we are delighted to be collaborating with around 40 organisations from a wide range of interests to make sure the success of the River Otter Beaver Trial expands into a green revolution in our wetland landscapes across the country."

Importantly within the English Beaver Strategy Working Group, land management groups and conservationists are working together, sharing experience and ensuring everyone is represented and heard.

Ann Maidment, Director South West of CLA says: "Given the momentum and support for the reintroduction of the beaver in England, the CLA believe strongly in the importance of having a clear framework for their future management, including stakeholder consultation. We were therefore pleased to be involved in this strategy – working together collaboratively with other stakeholders, to ensure that the importance of the landowning, farming and fishing communities are represented and their rights protected."

Beaver Trust's engagement process tries to ensure everyone is heard and compromise will be reached. There is a shared understanding that some members of the Working Group are not able to support the strategy proposals.

James Robinson, Director of Conservation at Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) says: "Beaver Trust's process has been a gold standard for stakeholder engagement. I am very impressed and may pinch it! We at WWT encourage other stakeholders to join up and be heard."

Shaun Leonard, Director of Wild Trout Trust says: "Research shows the impact of beavers on trout and salmon can be both positive and negative. English rivers and their fish populations are already suffering from fragmentation of habitat due to tens of thousands of weirs and culverts. Beavers' habitat engineering activity, including building dams, could be problematic for fish in many rivers. We can't support the proposals at this stage, but by participating in the Working Group we will be able to influence the future strategy for beaver introductions and their management."

Members of the group say that a plan is needed for where and how to increase beaver populations in the wild as an integrated part of river catchment plans targeting areas where benefits outweigh the costs.

The first enclosed beaver trial in England was at Ham Fen in 2002. There are now nine enclosures – including research sites at the Cornwall Beaver Project and Spains Hall Estate – where data shows the impacts of beaver-created wetlands on water flow, purity and biodiversity.

Following unofficial releases, beavers live in wild, self-sustaining populations in some English rivers. In 2016, habitat mapping in Scotland showed 104,000 hectares of beaver-friendly habitat. Beavers could be integrated within existing catchment spatial plans in England including buffers to allow rivers to flow naturally and reduce



conflict. Licensed releases, including from enclosures, should follow catchment assessments, community consultation and establishing local support groups.

Emma Marsh, Director of RSPB England says: “The RSPB is pleased to be working in partnership with conservation, fishing, farming and forestry organisations to develop a national strategy for beavers in England and to ensure the right balance of protection and management for this species. We would like to see beavers restored to suitable habitat in England, living harmoniously alongside land managers and treasured by local communities for the benefits, including natural solutions to flood risks, that they provide.”

Beaver Trust and the English Beaver Strategy Working Group have encouraged Defra and Natural England to publish a timeline to engage with stakeholders.

“We must welcome a new era of urgent, creative and respectful collaboration, where we listen to each other, put aside our differences and make decisions that benefit all members of the community. Everyone has a stake in our planet’s future, and, with the right support, the humble beaver can help restore the rivers that sustain us and much of our wildlife,” said Beaver Trust’s James Wallace.

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Further quotes for editors from Working Group members:

Andrew Kerr, Chair of Sustainable Eel Group says: “This is great work and a useful model for us and others to follow in creating positive engagement that will lead to effective action.”

Prof. Fiona Mathews, Chair of The Mammal Society says: “Beavers are currently endangered in Britain because their populations are small and highly fragmented. We are calling on the government to support a national strategy that restores beavers across the country. The Mammal Society has shown that 25% of our native mammals are under threat of extinction; a thriving beaver population will play an important role in creating habitat for many other species including Britain's most rapidly declining species, the water vole.”

Dr. Sam Bridgewater, Head of Conservation and Wildlife at Clinton Devon Estates says: “Thank you [Beaver Trust] for leading on the important development of the English Beaver Strategy and for navigating through the broad array of views on this subject to arrive at a consensus document. Through the Estate’s involvement with the River Otter Beaver Trial, we have seen first hand the benefits beavers can bring to society. We have also seen the conflicts that can arise and believe there is a need to manage this species going forward. We believe adopting the proposed strategy would help to avoid the negative impacts of these amazing creatures whilst allowing benefits to be maximised.”

Ben McCarthy, Head of Conservation and Restoration Ecology at the National Trust says: “The National Trust’s beaver reintroductions have demonstrated how instrumental they can be in restoring our wetlands. Not only is it great to see this enigmatic species once again in our waterways but it is also helping drive our ambition for nature’s recovery and that is good for all of us. This announcement marks an important step in extending these benefits across the country and delivering nature based solutions to help tackle the impacts of climate change and the nature crisis and we look forward to playing our part.”

Sara Lom, CEO of The Tree Council says: “The Tree Council is pleased to be a part of the Working Group aiming to reinstate the beaver back into the English landscape. These special animals once played a vital role in shaping the landscape for the better by coppicing trees and keeping woodlands naturally vibrant. Through their unique management of trees and water, they will increase biodiversity and alleviate floods, which will help both people and wildlife.”

Richard Young, Director of Conservation Knowledge, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and Co-chair of the IUCN Small Mammal Specialist Group says: “Returning beavers to suitable areas of England will breathe life into our rivers and landscapes, and provide huge benefits to many people. A science-based national strategy, respecting the needs of farming and other rural communities, is the best way of bringing this change about.”



Notes for editors on the Proposals for an English Beaver Strategy sent to Defra:

The [Proposals for an English Beaver Strategy](#) document has been drafted by Beaver Trust and members of the English Beaver Strategy Working Group. Proposals fall into two phases:

1. Current: The status and management of current beaver populations.
2. Future: Implementing the first 5 years of a national beaver restoration plan.

The proposals attempt to balance co-existence and restoration with management and livelihoods. They are informed by the ROBT reports, experience and science from Scotland and other European countries, and consultation with wildlife, farming, fishing, forestry, water and conservation groups.

NB: please note in the accompanying document that some members of the Working Group are identified as not able to support the proposals.

1. Proposals for the status and management strategy for free-living beavers in England

The Working Group proposes that a regulatory framework and management strategy for free-living beavers in England should be created. The following proposals are suggested:

1. Allow existing wild beaver populations in England to remain and expand naturally through local river catchments, supported by representative local beaver management groups (BMGs), management plans and monitoring.
2. Recognise Eurasian beavers as a native species with appropriate legal status in England and safeguards that enable timely, responsible and effective management and their reintegration into the landscape.
3. Establish a robust national management framework with a hierarchy of increasing impact: actions starting with education, risk avoidance, mitigation, then trapping and relocation, and lethal control.
4. Provide a framework for long-term public and private financial assistance for catchment management, risk avoidance and liabilities including BMG support and mitigation measures for stakeholders affected by the impacts of beavers.

2. Proposals for the first 5 years of a national beaver restoration strategy:

A 5-year implementation plan to start delivering the 25-year vision for restoring beavers to suitable habitats in their former range should be created using IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations. The following proposals are suggested:

- 2.1 Agree an implementation plan for restoring beavers in England, prioritising catchments with suitable habitats where benefits will outweigh costs and beavers are more likely to be accepted.
- 2.2 Develop integrated catchment funding mechanisms to incentivise stakeholders to give space to water and support mitigation schemes by reflecting the ecosystem services provided and impact on existing land-uses.
- 2.3 Licence wild releases of beavers, including from enclosures, into suitable rivers as part of catchment planning, and following suitability assessments, community consultation (e.g. neighbouring stakeholders) and establishing BMGs.
- 2.4 Approve translocation best practice guidelines for the restoration of responsibly-sourced Eurasian beavers between countries with health screening and quarantine measures to restore a viable national population.
- 2.5 Support catchment partnerships, communities and land-based businesses to develop catchment restoration plans with nature-based solutions, raise awareness and help community stakeholders to co-exist with beavers.

