

Environment and Sustainability Committee –

Invasive Alien Species in Wales

Written evidence from the GB Non-native Species Secretariat, Sand Hutton, York, YO19 5QR.

GB Non-native Species Programme Board and its Secretariat

Following the recommendations of the GB-wide review of policy on non-native species in 2001-02, the GB Programme Board for Non-native Species was established in 2005. It comprises senior officials from the GB Administrations and their Agencies, including Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales. Its main role is to provide a forum for non-native species policy coordination across Great Britain and to prioritise key areas of work. The Programme Board is supported by an independent secretariat (the NNSS), comprising 2.6 staff, which is based in York.

The NNSS (on behalf of the Programme Board) provides a key coordinating role across a wide range of government and non-government stakeholders. In addition, the NNSS:

- Is responsible for the development of Invasive Species Action Plans (ISAPs)
- Has developed a comprehensive risk analysis mechanism (unique in the EU) to support prioritisation of action across GB and underpin legislation such as the recently announced ban on sale of five aquatic plants
- Is responsible for establishing and running working groups that report to the Programme Board (Media and Comms, Training, Rapid Response)
- Runs the Local Action Group workshop to help support local action across GB.
- Organises the annual Stakeholder Forum (to be held in Cardiff in 2013)
- Runs a website which is supported financially by Welsh Government and its Agencies (approx. £5K PA).
- Provided a substantial contribution into the UK input into the European Commission Legislative Instrument (including a 3-month secondment to the Commission in 2012-13).

The Non-native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain was developed in partnership between government and non-government stakeholders and launched by Defra, Welsh and Scottish Ministers in 2008. It provides the high level policy framework for delivering action against non-native species and sets out key actions to be taken forward by government. It follows the CBD three stage hierarchical approach prioritising prevention, followed by early detection and rapid response and finally long-term control and mitigation.

Adequacy of data and information currently available on the extent and impacts of invasive alien species in Wales

Different types of data are required to inform policy makers on non-native species issues which, amongst other things, include: distribution data, data on the biology / ecology of the species, evidence of the impacts caused, data on pathways of introduction and spread, and research into methods of control.

There are a number of mechanisms that have been established in GB to improve the availability and quality of data, key examples are given below.

The GB Non-native Species Information Portal (fully funded by Defra) was established in 2009 and its work is ongoing. Among the key aims of the NNSIP project are to:

- provide a central place for non-native species information in GB
- increase the data flow of non-native species distribution data (particularly for high priority species) into the central recording system (i.e. NBN Gateway), which is key to the development of species-specific policies
- issue alerts for some of the highest priority / new invasive non-native species
- horizon scan for new threats to GB
- analyse trends in non-native species data.

The GB Risk Analysis Mechanism is the principle source of evidence about the risks posed to GB by non-native species. The mechanism is funded by Defra and produces individual species risk assessments (either detailed or rapid) which are produced by experts, peer reviewed and then scrutinised by an expert panel before being subject to public comment. The risk assessments also help to collate and summarise scientific literature relating to the species being assessed.

Some key research projects have also helped underpin work on Non-native Species (NNS). One of the most significant has been the research on economic impacts that was carried out by CABI (funded by Defra, Welsh and Scottish Governments) which reported in 2010. The research found that the cost to the GB Economy was at least £1.7 Billion (£125Million in Wales) and highlighted the costs of some key species - £166M for Japanese knotweed (key data to underpin this analysis was provided by Swansea City Council). This research also highlighted the economic imperative to act rapidly on detection of a new invasive species (e.g. the early eradication of Water Primrose will cost in the region of £100K but eradication when the species is widely established (if indeed it were possible) would cost over £240M).

Remaining Priority Data Needs:

- To improve data flow, particularly for new detections of high priority and alert species
- A risk management framework to support decision makers and aid prioritisation
- More data to support risk assessment (especially on impacts)
- More empirical data on pathways of introduction and spread.

Action taken to date by the Welsh Government and relevant authorities to tackle this issue

Below are some highlights of NNS action in Wales since the establishment of the GB Programme Board.

Japanese Knotweed Biocontrol

The UK is the first EU member state to develop and release a biocontrol agent for use against a non-native plant species – Japanese Knotweed. After eight years of extensive research the specialist knotweed psyllid was released in 2010. It may take many years to know whether the biocontrol agent is effective, but it is hoped that it will help to significantly reduce the damage caused by Japanese Knotweed in the long term.

The Welsh Government was one of the founding funders of the research into Japanese Knotweed biocontrol, alongside other funders including Defra, the Environment Agency, British Waterways and Network Rail.

Didemnum vexillum (Sea squirt) eradication in Holyhead

The attempted eradication of Dv in Holyhead is a world-class attempt and one of the very few eradications worldwide of a marine species. This innovative eradication attempt was led by CCW with support from Welsh Government. Like many 'rapid responses' it took repeated effort. The total cost of this has been over £750K.

Marine Pathways LIFE+ bid

CCW led efforts across the UK and Ireland to submit an innovative bid on marine pathways to the EU LIFE+ Programme. Sadly the bid appears to have failed but it is hoped that this important preventative project will be taken forward with the money already committed.

Slipper Limpets – Menai Strait

Prompt action by CCW (in collaboration with other agencies and the mussel growers industry) resulted in the rapid eradication of an introduced population of slipper limpets in the Menai Strait.

Water primrose (Ludwigia grandiflora) rapid response eradication

Environment Agency Wales has led on the attempt to eradicate this highly invasive aquatic plant species in Wales (it is part of a wider GB rapid response to this species which is taking several years and is likely to cost (GB-wide) over £100K in total).

African clawed frog (Xenopus laevis) rapid response eradication

CCW and Welsh Government have overseen the successful eradication in Wales of this GB priority rapid response species (which Natural England has also eradicated in England to complete a GB-wide eradication). Cost of less than £10K.

Sika deer rapid response

NRW is attempting to eradicate the only known population of this highly invasive species in Wales following the agreeing of an action plan and work to assess current distribution.

Asian Hornet Contingency Plan

Welsh Government and the National Bee Unit are key players in the Contingency Plan for the Asian Hornet (not yet in GB). This is the only contingency plan for a non-native species (of non plant or animal health interest) in any EU Member State.

Involvement with Public awareness campaigns

Welsh Government and its agencies have supported the two GB public awareness campaigns – Be Plant Wise and Check Clean Dry although they were not initially involved with the Be Plant Wise Campaign. EA Wales developed a video for the Check Clean Dry campaign that is now being used by the rest of GB.

How action to tackle invasive alien species in Wales could be improved

Resource needs

While much has been achieved to date in Wales, future work would greatly benefit from a dedicated budget for NNS especially to respond to urgent needs – such as the arrival of a new species where immediate action is necessary.

Increased emphasis on prevention

There is a need to concentrate effort on the key pathways of introduction and spread of NNS in Wales. There is already a lot of effort being put into two key pathways: (i) horticulture (especially aquatic plants which are the biggest risk) and (ii) reducing the spread of NNS by aquatic users such as anglers, boat owners etc. This pathway approach needs to be broadened with other pathways such as escapes from zoos and wildlife parks as well as the release of pets being targeted.

Continuing emphasis on rapid response and more contingency planning

There is a continuing need to respond rapidly to newly emerging threats in Wales and indeed to be more proactive - developing contingency plans for species that are likely to invade. Sharing the expertise and capacity to respond to these species with the other GB administrations is important to ensure value for money.

Communication

Communications is a key part of prevention, helping to modify negative behaviours that might introduce or spread non-native species. There has been good progress and success with the Be Plant Wise and Check Clean Dry campaigns, but these will need to be sustained and expanded if they are to make a significant impact.

Legislation

There is an urgent need for powers of entry to assist with control and eradication work (and potentially monitoring). These powers (which are part of a Control Order regime that has recently been introduced in Scotland) are being considered by the Law Commission in its review of wildlife management legislation in England and Wales. Lack of these powers has significantly hindered control action on key invasive species in both England and Scotland.

Increased local action

Local action is a vital component of the response to NNS particularly for the long term management of intractable species such as Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam but also for helping raise public and stakeholder awareness. It is, however, important that this is done at the appropriate scale (often catchment scale or larger) is strategic and that it fits in with national priorities. Having dedicated central capacity to ensure this occurs would represent good value for money.

GB Collaboration

There is a continued need to be closely involved with efforts across GB to ensure that there is no duplication of effort across the administrations. Wales benefits from the investment of Defra in particular e.g. on the initial development of Be Plant Wise (cost of over £200K), the provision of risk assessments (over £50K Per annum), the Non-native Species Information Portal (over £100K PA) and Non-native Species Secretariat (over 200K PA).

More joined up action with Plant Health colleagues

We need to continue to ensure that we maintain close links with Plant and Animal Health as there is much overlap in the approaches needed for NNS and these areas (e.g. on risk assessment, prioritising pathways and biosecurity messages).

General

There is always a danger that as more work is done in this area there is a greater emphasis on process and bureaucracy. The current effort is lean and action-focussed and this needs to remain the case.

EU Legislative Instrument on IAS

The EU Legislative instrument is due to be adopted by the Commission shortly. It is likely to contain measures relating to a black list of invasive species of EU concern (there are likely to be restrictions on import, sale, possession etc.), pathways, monitoring and reporting. The UK is well ahead of most other Member States in its strategic response to NNS and we are well placed to comply with any provisions that the Commission's proposals are likely to contain. We will need to ensure that the review of the GB Strategy is conducted in conjunction with the developing EU Legislation.