

Isle of Wight Beaver Introduction Steering Group

DRAFT Terms of Reference – June 2022 to [decision on wild release licence application]

Background

The Eurasian Beaver (*Castor fiber*) has been reintroduced to England in a number of locations, with wild populations now living in catchments including the River Otter, Tamar, Stour, Wye, Avon and Frome. In order to evaluate the impact of beavers upon biodiversity and communities in England, the government authorised the establishment of the River Otter Beaver Trial (ROBT) in Devon in 2015. The Trial ran for five years, during which time data was collected on beaver ecology and socio-economic impact, while nearby at the enclosed Devon Beaver Project located on the headwaters of the Tamar, the University of Exeter studied the impact of beaver damming on water quality and flash flooding. Following the culmination of the ROBT in 2020, and based on the evidence of the trial, the government announced that wild living beavers will be given permission to remain in England. The government then launched a national consultation in 2021, in order to gather perspectives on beaver reintroduction and management in England. The consultation document announced the national approach to permit further wild reintroductions of beavers, and the intention to give beavers native species protected status in England (native species protected status having already been afforded to beavers in Scotland), due to come into force 1st October 2022.

Given the benefits that beavers have been demonstrated to bring, both in enhancing biodiversity but also through the provision of ecosystem services including water storage, water quality enhancement, flash flood mitigation and boosting rural economies through wildlife watching, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust have initiated steps to assess the feasibility of a beaver release in the Eastern Yar catchment of the Isle of Wight. A feasibility study was commissioned by the Trust in 2020 which, combined with the modelling data on beaver habitat suitability by the University of Exeter, concluded that the Eastern Yar catchment was highly suitable for beaver release and long-term occupation. Following this favourable assessment, a Beaver Recovery Project Officer was hired to carry out a consultation on beaver release across the Island and, given local support, lead on a licence application to Natural England.

A criterion of the licence application process is the formation of a steering group, as outlined in the government's Reintroductions and other Conservation Translocations: Code and Guidance for England document, to provide stakeholders a forum for oversight and guidance for the proposed beaver introduction. The purpose of this document is to introduce and define the Terms of Reference and roles and responsibilities of the members that collectively form the Isle of Wight Beaver Introduction Steering Group.

Purpose/role of this group:

Steering Group membership envisage a two-stage purpose and role for attendees, contingent on a Phase 1 pre-decision on licence application, and Phase 2 post-decision on licence application, with membership and Terms of Reference subject to revision upon progression to Phase 2.

Phase 1 (pre-decision on licence application)

The Steering Group in its current form will take on an advisory role to guide the project through the process of licence application for a wild release of beavers onto the Isle of Wight, up until a decision has been made by Natural England.

Phase 2 (post-decision on licence application)

If the licence application is successful, the Steering Group would then convene to oversee and support the management of wild beavers and their associated wetlands throughout the Eastern Yar catchment, and the Island as a whole in the event of dispersal into neighbouring rivers. The Steering Group would provide advice and (where appropriate) support to HIWWT to deliver an effective management approach for a healthy free-living beaver population on the Island, while promoting and facilitating co-existence of riparian residents and landowners with this ecosystem engineer. An inclusive approach would be adopted to ensure that stakeholders' interests are represented in the decisions made about how the beavers and associated riparian landscapes would be monitored and managed. The Isle of Wight Beaver Introduction Steering Group would bring together local stakeholders in the Eastern Yar catchment and across the Island, for example, agencies, landowners, farmers, and NGOs - to ensure that any issues that arise from beaver introduction and population expansion are promptly and effectively managed. This would be achieved through the following:

- The Steering Group would share information, experience and advice to assist Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) with undertaking the Isle of Wight Beaver Introduction Project.
- The Steering Group would meet to monitor and evaluate the progress of the project, to address any issues and identify any conflicts. Ensure the project's on-going compliance with all licences, regulations and agreements.
- The Steering Group would establish and receive reports from HIWWT on monitoring and evaluation of the Beaver Introduction Project.
- The Steering Group would receive updates from the Project Officer at each meeting to report on project progress.
- The Steering Group would help facilitate better communication, participation and liaison, following HIWWT's Communications Plan. The Steering Group would annually review the factors against which the Exit Strategy is assessed, with advice and input from statutory and public authorities. Natural England and the Environment Agency would both be invited to attend all meetings (in an observational and advisory capacity) and be party to all correspondence relating to exit triggers. Natural England would authorise the implementation of the exit strategy as independent monitors of the introduction.

Representatives, Chair, Attendees, Secretary, Terms of Office

- The Steering Group will normally consist of no more than 30 representatives drawn from the organisations listed in Annex 1.
- New organisations may be added by agreement of the Steering Group and on review.
- An independent Chair will be appointed to the Steering Group by HIWWT and will serve for five years.

- Natural England will be the deputy chair.
- This is a voluntary group.
- Representatives of organisations should be accountable for reporting back to their wider organisations or groups. Where appropriate, representatives of the Steering Group will hold direct discussions with any stakeholder groups to ensure that they represent the interests of those stakeholders, and disseminate information about beaver management to those groups, acting as a conduit for information and ideas.
- Representatives may be nominated by the organisations and representation at meetings may be replaced by other members of that organisation, but continuity of participation is preferred.
- The Steering Group may agree additional attendance at meetings (such as expert specialists and any members of the ancillary groups) in consultation with the Chair.
- The Steering Group will meet twice per year. Any additional meetings will be called at the discretion of the Chair.
- The Secretariat for the Forum will be arranged by HIWWT.

Terms of Reference of the Isle of Wight Beaver Introduction Steering Group

- To provide a forum to *update stakeholders on progress of project*, **review issues, discuss options for resolving any issues** and hold accountable against Principles set out in the Natural England licence.
- Provide the opportunity for members to **hear evidence and be updated** on emerging issues in the project locally and nationally.
- To hear evidence on monitoring and evaluation of the Beaver Introduction Project and request HIWWT to undertake other areas of research and/or evidence as required.
- To **receive, comment and make recommendations** from the outputs of the ancillary groups.
- To **receive and comment** on the annual review of the project.
- **Foster better interaction** between the different groups and stakeholders and support transparency and knowledge exchange on restoration activity.
- To **identify opportunities** to promote the project's outcomes.
- The steering group has the opportunity to continue to meet after the completion of the licencing period of the project as needed. HIWWT can continue to host this group.
- Since it is recognised that due to beavers' foraging and dam building activities and subsequent role as ecosystem engineers, a non-intervention management approach is not the best way of facilitating co-existence with landowners. For this reason, following the end of the licencing period and the formal requirement of a steering group, it may be appropriate for the group to continue in the capacity of a Beaver Management Group, such as has been the case in Devon following the conclusion of the licenced River Otter Beaver Trial. At this point, membership and Terms of Reference of the group may change as appropriate. The decision to continue and the

management of the group's transition would be undertaken jointly by the Chair, the Deputy Chair Natural England, and HIWWT.

Minutes and Reporting

- While meetings of the Steering Group will not be public, **HIWWT will publish details of the Steering Group** on its project website including membership, terms of reference, agenda and minutes, except items of a confidential nature.
- Transparency: the Steering Group's constitution and working arrangements are **subject to a review at the end of the first year, then every second year.**
- All proceedings and resolutions of this Steering Group will be minuted; such minutes being circulated, and agreed as accurate and then formally approved and signed at their subsequent meeting. Minutes will be circulated to group members and to those in attendance.
- These Terms of Reference and protocols will be reviewed / approved at the first meeting of the Forum.
- Following the outbreak of Covid19, meetings of the Steering Group may be held virtually if necessary.

Confidentiality

- Items discussed at the group may be identified as being of a confidential nature, in order to protect the beavers or sensitive sites. Information discussed at any meetings that should remain confidential will be identified as such.

Annex 1 Steering Group Members

Organisation	Representatives name
Chair of Steering Group	Matthew Chatfield
Deputy Chair/Natural England	Mark Larter
HIWWT	Jamie Marsh, Izzie Tween
AONB: Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer/ Isle of Wight Biodiversity Records Centre	Mark Simmons/ Lucy Temple
ARC Consulting	Ian Boyd/Nigel George
Country Land and Business Association	Lucy Charman
East Yar Farmer Cluster	Caroline Knox
Environment Agency	Adam Cave
Forestry England	Leanne Sargeant
Island Rivers	Carol Flux
Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils	June Davison
Isle of Wight Council	Grace Booth
Isle of Wight Natural History Society	Colin Pope
Isle of Wight Rights of Way	Darrel Clarke
Island Roads	Mark Roberts
Local Access Forum	Jennine Gardiner
National Farmers Union	Robyn Munt
National Trust	Mike Greenslade
Newchurch & District Piscatorial Society	Richard Wilson
RSPB	Keith Ballard/Dante Munns
Southern Water	Chris Weeks/Brendan Jones
South Wight Farmer Cluster	James Attrill
Wildheart Trust	Lisa Banfield
Corresponding Member	
Office of the MP Isle of Wight	Bob Seely