



Briefing 08/44 September 2008

The Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and Email Contacts (England, Scotland and Wales)

Cc: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and Email Contacts (Northern Ireland)

Key issues

The framework is a product of the Governments within England, Scotland and Wales to tackle the issue of invasive non-native species on the landmass of Great Britain.

This briefing sets out the key elements of the strategy, including the involvement of local government in meeting these challenges.

1. Introduction

Invasive non-native species continue to represent a serious threat to the British ecosystem, not only in their pest potential and the damage they cause, but in the unintended and far-reaching consequences on the ecology and economy of Great Britain. An example such as Japanese Knotweed is an ornamental plant indigenous to Japan and China. A large vigorous weed that has no natural enemies, Japanese Knotweed can damage property by growing through tarmac, of which a fragment (0.8

grammes) can grow rapidly to form a new plant. It remains difficult to eradicate once present and aggressively over-runs native plants, at the expense of the ecological diversity of Great Britain.

Great Britain as an island, in contrast to continental Europe, is protected from land and freshwater-based invasions, but remains susceptible to marine infestations. Increasingly invasions transmitted via new pathways, such as international flights and the Channel Tunnel, represent new means in which invasive species may proliferate.

Non-native species are defined as species whose introduction and/or spread threaten biological biodiversity or entail other unforeseen impacts. Flora and fauna deemed 'invasive' can be hard to categorise due to their invasive potential varying over time and location. To effectively combat the damage that non-native species can cause, the governments of England, Scotland and Wales and associated stakeholders have produced a national policy framework for the management of invasive non-native species in Great Britain.

2. Aims of the Strategy

The main aim of the Strategy is to minimise risk and reduce the negative impacts caused by invasive non-native species. This is to be achieved by improving overall clarity and co-ordination between government and its associated bodies; increase public and professional awareness of non-native species issues and appropriate guidance; reduce and prevent the introduction of non-native species; ensure appropriate effective contingency plans are in place to prevent and that sustainable action to control non-native species is resourced; to provide a decision-making framework and communication process is in place; and identify gaps and priority areas for further development.

The legislative provision related to non-native species at this moment is spread over a wide range of Acts over the various governments; nature conservation is a devolved matter. The Strategy takes regard of the national biodiversity strategies for England, Scotland and Wales, and aims to bring more cohesion to addressing invasive non-native species.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The three governments will take the overall lead role in driving forward implementation of the Strategy through a specially convened Programme Board, with a complementary Secretariat, Risk Analysis Panel and Stakeholder Forum. Stakeholder involvement will be provided for through the establishment of working groups, expected to involve national statutory conservation bodies, the respective national environment agencies such as SEPA and the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission, and others. It is expected that many of the measures will have to be taken forward in partnership, such as with landowners and key special interest groups.

It is expected that many of the measures will need to be taken forward in partnership between the governments and appropriate stakeholders.

The roles and responsibilities provide a framework in which the future activities of the Strategy centre on four key areas: Prevention; Early Detection, Surveillance, Monitoring and Rapid Response; Mitigation, Control and Eradication; and Building Awareness and Understanding.

3.1. Prevention

Due to the virulent nature of many invasive non-native species an emphasis on prevention remains the least environmentally damaging intervention, and more realisable for an island such as Great Britain than continental Europe. Robust risk assessment and effective horizon scanning are seen as the most effective tools in preventing the spread of invasive non-native species. This will be achieved by providing better access to relevant information, involving the Risk Analysis Panel in applying a risk assessment process for the use of stakeholders, and using working groups or lead bodies to draw up action plans as and when necessary.

3.2. Early Detection, Surveillance, Monitoring and Rapid Response

Central to the Strategy is the detection, surveillance, monitoring and rapid response to the alien species. The presence of known invasive non-native species, and other species whose invasive potential is not yet known, exists across a wide spectrum of taxonomic groups.

To achieve early detection; co-ordination of data collection and data-holding amongst various agencies, institutes, NGOs, universities and individuals is central. This will assist in the development of an early warning system for both flora and fauna. Protocols for the surveillance and monitoring of alien species will be agreed, alongside the need for making taxonomic expertise more widely available, and identify appropriate means of securing adequate resources to carry out rapid responses to contingencies.

3.3. Mitigation, Control and Eradication

Full-scale eradication is a costly procedure that has only a small chance of being wholly successful. Factors that contribute to successful eradication include early detection/response, sufficient economic resources devoted for a sufficient duration, and widespread support from the relevant agencies and the public. Therefore a number of options aside from eradication are available to those working with alien species; these include mitigating negative impacts (for instance by establishing refuges for threatened species), or attempting to control the spread of the species. Each technique involves issues that have to be taken into consideration, such as whether the measures are technically and financially feasible, acceptably humane, and safe for people and native wildlife populations.

Mitigation is carried out by a variety of organisations in Britain, ranging from work on a local scale to national level, from private land-owners to public bodies. Governments and agencies should focus on prevention measures, early intervention action and large-scale programmes; supporting land-owners and managers via advice and practical information. The Programme Board will look to encourage and support work programmes for local or regional fora, for example the Tweed Forum, a forum of statutory and non-statutory organisations with an interest in the sustainable management of the Tweed catchment. The Risk Analysis Panel will set the guiding principles for identifying threats, assess priority invasive species, and designate working groups to draft management plans for the prioritised invasive species.

3.4. Building Awareness and Understanding

Tackling the public's limited understanding of invasive non-native species is seen as crucial to the success of the Strategy. This potentially could include modifying behaviour to help reduce the likelihood of introducing or spreading non-native species, assistance with their detection and monitoring, and to encourage responsible behaviour in the movement, storage, use and release of non-native species. A range of means will have to be employed to communicate with different groups, not only in the choice of medium, but in the key message that is to be delivered. This will also seek to take account of utilising local knowledge gained through partnerships, influencing timing and targeting of communications, thematic campaigns and other suitable measures.

One specific action will be the creation of a Secretariat website on invasive non-native species issues, linking agencies, NGOs and others working on alien species. The website will form a key source of information on governmental action and progress.

4. APSE comment

Invasive non-native plant and animal species are a massive threat to biodiversity. They can have a negative impact on native species, transform habitats and threaten whole eco-systems causing serious problems to the environment and the economy.

Local authorities are affected by species across service areas. For example, species of plants/weeds can cause problems on highways and footpaths, sports fields, parks, and housing estates, and control of these is vital for many reasons. Apart from aesthetics, weeds can cause health problems, can result in litigation, attract high numbers of complaints and are costly to local authorities. The actual physical control and eradication of weeds is expensive but added to the cost of repairing damage to property, the cost of litigation where accidents or damage have occurred, the overall value of urban weed control is around £200m per year, mostly in the public sector.

APSE believes that developing awareness has to be a key element if the main aim of the strategy is to minimise risk. How many species, or variations of invasive plant species have been introduced to the UK because of ignorance? How many garden centres are still selling variations of Japanese Knotweed as an attractive garden plant?

If emphasis is not placed on education then there is little hope of preventing further invasion of non-native species across the UK.

APSE therefore welcomes a formal framework strategy highlighting the need for prevention, early detection, control and eradication, and building awareness. The framework's aim to improve cohesion across existing legislation and powers is essential, particularly considering the probability of specific EU legislation on non-native invasive species being introduced and having to be transposed into domestic legislation.

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