



Lynn Tullis  
Clerk  
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform  
Committee

Dear Lynn

7 August 2018

I refer to your email of 9 July to Bridget Campbell and Sally Thomas, seeking further information following their recent appearance at the Committee. I have been asked to reply on their behalf.

**Mark Ruskell questioned the approach to dealing with invasive species and requested further detail on action plans at a catchment level and interim targets.**

Under the Rivers and Fisheries Trust Invasive Species and Biosecurity Programme, local Fisheries Trusts have prepared biosecurity plans for 23 areas, with geographic coverage for 90% of Scotland. These identified a number of biosecurity risks to our rivers and lochs from invasive non-native plants and animals.

Giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed growing on river banks was identified as a significant management issue in 15 of these biosecurity plans. Coordinated control programmes were initiated by the local Fisheries Trust in 14 of these areas. Details of this work can be found on the RAFTS Invasive Species and Biosecurity Programmer website, <http://www.invasivespeciesscotland.org.uk/>, and the websites of the individual Trusts.

These initiatives are community-led and have been pump-primed with a limited amount of government funding. The aim is to reduce the populations of invasive plants to low levels and build capacity for control within the community, so that they can continue managing much smaller populations after the project has ended. Government did not set targets for areas of catchments to be cleared as this might encourage community groups to take on larger commitments than they can manage.

In some areas, such as Cromarty and Annan, populations of invasive plants have already been reduced to very low levels. In others, such as the Forth, control is at an early stage and concentrated on the upper parts of the catchment. The longest running of these is the Tweed Invasives Project, which has been delivering comprehensive control of giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed across the Tweed catchment since 2003. Various summary reports and case studies can be found on the Tweed Forum website. The key

message from this project is that controlling invasive plants at a catchment-scale requires persistence and a long-term strategy. Giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed are still reinvading previously cleared areas many years after apparent eradication.

Several Fisheries Trusts evaluated the success of invasive plant control carried out under the Controlling Priority Invasive Species (CIRB) project, supported by EU structural funds, under Interreg IVa. For example, The Galloway Fisheries Trust reported an average reduction in the area of Japanese knotweed of between 86% – 99% during the first few years of their control programmes.

Chris Horrill, former Director of RAFTS, presented a paper reviewing the success of these projects at the IUCN Island Invasives Conference in Dundee in 2017. He identified one of the main barriers to success as the relatively short-term nature of project funding compared to the long-term commitment required to maintain invasive plant populations at a low level. The proceedings will be published in autumn 2018.

The GB Non-Native Species Programme Board has estimated that an additional £100k per annum of government support is required to support the work of local action groups in Scotland, based on what this costs in England.

SNH is focussing its resources on a large Heritage Lottery Fund project, the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative, in the north of Scotland. SNH's contribution of £100k per annum over five years will help prevent these invasive plants spreading northwards and westwards into new areas of the Highlands. The project will also demonstrate a long-term sustainable approach to controlling invasive plants populations at low levels. SEPA no longer funds INNS projects under the Water Environment Fund, prioritising channel restoration and fish barrier removal instead.

**Richard Lyle questioned the effect of loss of funds to biodiversity targets post UK exit from the EU. The Committee would welcome further information on the Scottish Government/SNH assessment of the impact of this.**

EU funding has proved extremely beneficial for the protection and enhancement of our environment and to tackle climate change. It is essential that funding and resources to support delivery of Scotland's ambitions in this area are maintained at least at EU levels, including continued access to research funding. Existing EU funding which supports our environmental objectives includes CAP Pillar 2, European Regional Development Fund, Horizon2020, LIFE and Interreg programmes.

LIFE is the European Commission's dedicated environmental funding programme. It encourages innovative or best practice projects and cross-border collaboration, both within the UK and with other European countries. Projects match-funded under LIFE's Nature and Biodiversity strand are focused on implementing the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and Biodiversity Strategy. Recent examples in Scotland include Scottish Natural Heritage-led projects to protect freshwater pearl mussels, and to implement integrated habitat networks to improve ecological coherence across the Central Scotland Green Network. It is vital that funding for these kinds of unique project is not lost post-EU exit.

Furthermore, the allocation of funding for the environment should reflect the greater extent of natural habitats and protected areas in Scotland and the greater potential to deliver the UK's international agreements on biodiversity.

A key delivery mechanism for biodiversity projects is the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) within the Scottish Rural Development Programme. Since 2015 the scheme has supported over 2,200 applications by around £148m to fund a range of agri-environment and organic activities that help to maintain and enhance our rich and varied natural environment.

The Scottish Government has recently launched a consultation, Stability and Simplicity proposals for a rural funding transition period ([https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/economy-post-brexit-transition/user\\_uploads/00537221.pdf](https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/economy-post-brexit-transition/user_uploads/00537221.pdf)) about farm policy transition from 2019 to 2024. This envisages continuing, but improving, the current suite of schemes during that period. For AECS the consultation invites views on the ways the scheme may be improved or enhanced, and whether there are emerging priorities that AECS should focus on for the next three to five years.

In recognition of the fact that it takes time to achieve environmental benefits, current EU rules require AECS contracts to be multi-annual commitments for a minimum of five years. In the event of no EU deal, for contracts signed before the date of a UK exit from the EU, the UK Government has guaranteed to replace the EU element of the contracts, for the lifetime of that contract. In the event of a transition deal being agreed, the Scottish Government would continue to undertake payments utilising EU funding until the 2014-2020 projects have ended.

For any contracts signed after a no deal exit or beyond current EU funding in the event of transition, the UK Government has made a commitment to maintaining the same cash total in funds for “farm support” until 2022. The Scottish Government continues to seek clarity from the UK Government as to whether AECS will fall under the definition of “farm support” and for funding in future years beyond 2022. Any future funding for projects such as AECS will need to be considered as part of the Scottish Government’s overall budgetary envelope. Further information on the financial context within which we are operating can be found at pages 6 and 7 of the Stability and Simplicity consultation paper.

I hope that the above information is helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Dignon  
Head of Wildlife Management and Protected Areas