



## Scottish Beaver Trial

### Local Stakeholders Forum Meeting

Lochgilphead Community Centre, Manse Brae, Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2011, 14:00 – 15:30

- Present:** See end.
- Apologies:** Pete Slann, Jamie Mellor, Marina Curran Colthart, Drew McFarlane-Slack, Alex Hurst
- Abbreviations:**
- ABC** – Argyll & Bute Council
  - FCS** – Forestry Commission Scotland
  - RZSS** – Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
  - SBT** – Scottish Beaver Trial
  - SG** – Scottish Government
  - SNH** – Scottish Natural Heritage

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions.**

Councillor Donald Macmillan of ABC as Chair took a moment to acknowledge the sad passing of Sir Hugh Campbell-Byatt, who had attended previous Stakeholder Forums. He then went on to welcomed the participants to the Forum, who then introduced themselves.

#### **2. Minutes and Action Points from Meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> October 2010.**

The Minutes were approved. There were no outstanding action points.

#### **3. Overview of Beaver Trial Actions and Progress to Date.**

- Simon Jones (SBT Project Manager) recapped the overview of the aims of the trial as outlined in the licence application to the Scottish Government.
- The beaver distribution has changed little since the last meeting.
  - Dubh Loch: 1 adult female, 1 adult male, 1 juvenile female, 1 kit.
  - Loch Linne and Fidle: 1 adult female, 1 adult male, 1 juvenile male, 1 kit.
  - Loch Creag Mhor: 1 adult female, 1 adult male.
  - Loch Buic: 1 adult female, 1 adult male.
- It was noted that two juveniles on Dubh Loch and on Loch Linne have reached dispersal age and the juvenile had already exhibited dispersal behaviour. *Post script 5/5/11: this beaver is now known to have dispersed from his home territory and there is some evidence that he may have dispersed outwith the trial area. SBT field staff and local volunteers are undertaking searches in and around the trial site in an attempt to relocate the animal.*
- Field work and monitoring – all monitoring tasks were progressing as planned.

- New GPS tags have been trialled on some beavers and more will be deployed in the coming months.
- People and trial update – 14 beaver related events (500+ people) have taken place around Scotland since January 2011
- SBT has been invited to join the newly formed Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance.
- The SBT Education Pack is to be distributed to all schools in Scotland in the coming months. However the main focus will remain on working with local schools.
- SBT staffing update:
  - Simon Jones: SBT Project Manager
  - Roisin Campbell-Palmer: Field Operations Manager, RZSS
  - Christian Robstad: Field Officer.  
(Will be leaving the trial in June and the SBT will be looking to replace him soon).
  - Gill Dowse: Biodiversity Data Manager, SWT
  - Robert Needham: Assistant Field Officer
- There had been recent Easter events held at Barnluasgan (“Beaver Detective” workshops) and Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow – both as part of the European ‘Beaver Spring’ festival.
- Between June and September there would be weekly guided tours every Tuesday evening (6pm start) from the Barnluasgan Information Centre down to the Dubh Loch site.

#### Questions Arising - responses:

- Beavers in Knapdale do not have any natural predators however their natural behaviour is to swim away from danger in water that is generally at least 50cm deep. Otters have been recorded rarely preying beaver kits; however it is felt that there is no great cause for concern here. Otters and beavers have been observed in several lochs together and there is generally very little interaction.
- Presumably tourism opportunities will dilute if beavers are introduced nationally. But Knapdale will be unique for quite a few years. In other countries beaver tours still make money.
- There are no presumptions that the SBT will continue beyond the end of the trial in 2015. It is up to the Scottish Government to decide whether the beavers will remain in Knapdale and whether or not to reintroduce beavers elsewhere in Scotland.  
Unlicensed beavers on Tayside – questions answered by Andrew Taylor (SG) and Karen Taylor (SNH):
- The unlicensed beavers currently in and around in Tayside have no connection with the SBT and are present illegally. The provenance and origin of the animals is not clear.
- SNH approached the government with a proposal to trap an unknown number of beavers spotted at the Tay site. SNH conducted a trapping trial which ended in March 2011. One beaver was trapped, but died last month as a result of an infection, following a brief period in Edinburgh Zoo. SNH and SG are currently reviewing any potential future actions.

- SBT is a scientific trial which is properly monitored, following IUCN guidelines, unlike the beavers illegally released or escaped at the Tay sites. That is why it has been considered necessary to trap the beavers in Tay.
- Any beavers in the Tay, born in the wild do not have legal protection.
- The number of beavers in Tay is estimated at 6-20 individuals.
- It is difficult to prosecute those responsible for the releases. The Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill would have to be amended- It may be possible to impose orders requiring certain conditions i.e. that all beavers in private collections will have to be tagged (micro-chipped), but this is a matter for the future
- The National Farmers Union would like to state its dissatisfaction with the current SNH Tay beaver actions and trapping effort. – Robin Malcolm
- The time it takes to trap the beavers to check for tags depends on the individual beaver and the trapping method used.
- The trapping trial of the beavers in Tay had low costs as the trapping was undertaken by volunteers.
- It would be possible for RZSS to genetically test any trapped beavers.
- The SBT stands alone from what happens elsewhere. It is a scientific trial.
- There are 4 options for the exit strategy for removing the beavers in Knapdale if that is required by the SG:
  - (i) Repatriate beavers to Norway
  - (ii) Capture, neuter and re-release beavers in Knapdale to let them live out their lives.
  - (iii) Capture the beavers and place them in captivity.
  - (iv) Humane destruction by marksman.
- If the Scottish government says the beavers must be removed at the end of the trial, they will be removed.
- The decision to stop in Knapdale and move on to a full reintroduction largely depends on the result of the trial, with relevant experiences from elsewhere in Europe being taken into account.
- There is no decision yet on what happens after 5 years.
- The success of the trial won't be clear until the end of the trial.
- Resources are in place to see the trial through to the end.
- Concern with the beaver trial - All anyone needs to do is to get the Scottish public on their side. Not so much of a scientific trial. There seems to be no proper exit strategy. It's rather vague.

#### **4 Update on Access and Recreation within Trial Area – Helen Watt, Forestry Commission**

- The Dubh Loch-Loch Coille Bharr diversion path has been opened and is in use.
- FCS has a new leaflet that has been published and is available at the Barnluasgan Information Centre.
- New finger post at the dam will be in place by the end of this April/beginning of May. There are a few options for the proposed viewing facility at the Dubh Loch. The favoured option currently is to place a platform around the existing track and board

walk. The FCS is currently waiting to see how the flooded trees are doing and are mindful of the sensitivity of the area and the beavers in making their final decision.

#### **Questions Arising – responses:**

- The unused pontoon section has now been used in a different project. It is now 3 diver rafts deployed across the district. There was SNH involvement.

#### **5 Update on Beaver trial Monitoring Programme – Karen Taylor, Scottish Natural Heritage**

- Reminder of SNH role – to lead and coordinate independent monitoring and report to SG
- An outline of the various independent monitoring projects was given.
- A tour was given of the SNH website, where published progress reports can be viewed.
- A list of reports published to date was given as well as reports to be published.

#### **Questions Arising – responses:**

- Suggestion: Give an update on the published reports and a delivery of promised reports on the beaver trial pages. This allows everyone to find them easier. Place a list of what has been published and what will be published on the SNH beaver trial page. **ACTION POINT 1: SNH** to address above points in relation to website.
- The fish that are being monitored in the trial area are mainly Brown trout, minnow, stickle back, and some sea trout. The monitoring mainly concentrates on streams. The methods were changed to fit what the beaver are doing.
- For a potential beaver effect on fish and river systems the monitoring program also looks at fish and river systems with beaver in other countries.
- The results of the public health water quality monitoring will be published at the end of the trial. The info is readily available if needed and can be discussed with Patrick Mackie at Argyll and Bute Council. So far there has been nothing significant to report.

#### **6 Open Q & A session**

In response to the questions it was briefed that:

- The Beaver Detective Workshop was carried out on Barnluasgan Loch rather than a loch that contains beavers because of the ease of access and because it is a shorter walk for children. At the end of the workshop there was a recommendation for participants to walk around Dubh Loch on their own.
- SNH will wait until the end of the trial to publish final reports. Published reports before this time only give indications of outcomes to date.

#### **7 AOCB**

There was no other business

#### **8 Date of next meeting**

September 2011 – date tbc. Potential venue would be at Achnamara Hall. Councillor Donald Macmillan of ABC will be chairman if he is available.

The Chairman closed the meeting and thanks the stakeholders and presenters.

**Scottish Beaver Trial**

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**In Attendance**

Councillor Donnie Macmillan, Ward 3: Mid Argyll, Argyll and Bute Council (Chair)

Andrew Taylor, Scottish Government

Christian Robstad, SBT

Dino Wright, neighbour

Helen Watt, FCS

James Livingston, neighbour

Jane Allan, neighbour

Karen Taylor, SNH

Lady Fiona Campbell-Byatt, Landowner

Mike Macintyre, neighbour

Milou Geven, SBT - minutes

Patrick Mackie, ABC Environmental Health Department

Philippa Revill, FCS

Robin Malcolm, National Farmers Union Scotland

Roisin Campbell-Palmer, RZSS

Simon Jones, SBT

Stan Phillips, SNH