

SCOTTISH  
BEAVER  
TRIAL



# Trial reintroduction of the European beaver to Knapdale, Mid-Argyll



## Local consultation report: 1 October - 30 November 2007

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# 1. Executive summary

In January 2007, the Scottish Government in partnership with its conservation advisors, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), launched the Species Action Framework (SAF).<sup>1</sup> This framework provides a strategic approach to species management in Scotland and identifies certain species requiring targeted management and action. Two reintroductions are included: white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and European beaver (*Castor fiber*).

Through SAF, organisations outwith SNH are encouraged to lead on individual species action. In July 2007, the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) agreed to work in partnership to secure the future reintroduction of the European beaver to Scotland.

In October 2007, under the project title of the Scottish Beaver Trial, the partnership with support from the Mammals Trust UK launched a two-month local consultation in the vicinity of the preferred trial site of Knapdale Forest, Mid-Argyll.

The consultation built on national and local consultations undertaken in 1998<sup>2</sup> and 2000<sup>3</sup> prior to the previous licence application and as part of the SAF. The consultation process is a key element of IUCN Reintroduction Guidelines.

Over 175 people attended events held in the area during the consultation period. A further 466 people submitted a formal response to the consultation by post or online.

As part of the consultation process, two key questions were posed to those consulted:

1. Would you like to see beavers in Scotland?
2. Would you support a trial reintroduction of beavers to Knapdale?

In addition, respondents were given the opportunity to write comments/questions on their consultation response.

From the responses received from Mid-Argyll, 72% were in favour of beavers returning to Scotland and 73% were in favour of beavers returning to Knapdale Forest. Out of the 466 responses, over 80% were defined as resident in Mid-Argyll (with postcodes PA29, PA30 and PA31).

The Knapdale segment (those living in Tayvallich, Achnamara, Crinan, Bellanoch and Cairnbaan) contained the strongest opposition (31 negative responses) proportionally. This included 20% of landowners recorded as being adjacent to the proposed trial site.

Seven (9%) national/local organisations out of 80 contacted raised “key concerns” and objections.

The majority of comments from those in favour of the trial related to benefits to biodiversity and wildlife tourism and a desire to see the reinstatement of the beaver in Scotland. Comments from those against the trial covered a wide range of concerns and perceptions including environmental and socio-economic impact, public health, containment, length of trial, historical evidence of previous range, consultation process, insurance and compensation, the presence of non-native introductions of species such as mink and the best use of resources.

The overall results reaffirmed the conclusions of previous consultations that there is widespread local public support for a trial reintroduction of the European beaver in Knapdale. The project partners were particularly encouraged by the number of consultation responses, which exceeded those received in the earlier local consultation (63).

The majority of issues relating to the conduct of the trial will be addressed in the licence application and/or will form part of the research and monitoring aims of the trial itself. The project partners consider that the level of support is sufficient to justify proceeding with the trial.

The consultation reinforces the continued requirement to involve the local community and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of the project; mechanisms for this will be included in the licence application. Project staff will endeavour to achieve constructive relationships with all national stakeholder bodies with a view to ensuring that the proposed trial benefits from their experience and input.

## 2. Introduction

*Directive 92/43/EEC Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna (the Habitats Directive) Article 22* makes provision for member states to consider reintroduction of species in Annex IV, including the European beaver. Article 22 states that it should take place “only after proper consultation of the public concerned”.

SNH carried out a national consultation in 1998 on the desirability of reintroducing beavers to Scotland and the results showed that 63% of respondents were in favour of a reintroduction. In response to the detailed feedback, the SNH Main Board decided to propose a trial reintroduction in a specific area over a time-limited period rather than undertake a widespread release. After a detailed review in 2000, Knapdale Forest in Mid-Argyll was selected as the most appropriate site for the trial.

In October and November 2000 a consultation in the local Knapdale area was carried out by SNH. Sixty-four percent of respondents from the Mid-Argyll area were in favour of the proposal.

Subsequent to the rejection of SNH’s application to the Scottish Government for a licence to run a trial beaver reintroduction, the Scottish Government joined with SNH, its conservation advisors, to launch the SAF. This framework provides a strategic approach to species management in Scotland and identifies certain species requiring targeted management and action. Two reintroductions were included: white-tailed eagle and European beaver.

Through SAF, organisations outwith SNH were encouraged to lead on individual species action. In July 2007, SWT and RZSS agreed to work in partnership to secure a trial reintroduction of the European beaver to Scotland.

In October 2007, under the project title of the Scottish Beaver Trial, SWT and RZSS, with support from the Mammals Trust UK, launched a two-month local consultation in the vicinity of the preferred trial site of Knapdale Forest, Mid-Argyll. The consultation built on national and local consultations undertaken as part of the previous licence application and the additional 2006 national consultation on the SAF. The consultation process is a key element of IUCN Reintroduction Guidelines and, as part of the SAF, any reintroduction must go through this process. To the best of SWT’s knowledge this is the most comprehensively consulted and researched species reintroduction proposal undertaken in Europe to date.

## 3. Consultation process

The consultation was undertaken over an eight week period (1 October – 30 November 2007). Given the extent and breadth of previously conducted national consultations it was concluded that a local consultation (Mid-Argyll) was most appropriate, specifically to:

- re-validate the previous consultation(s);
- engage the community with the proposal and provide a process to respond to questions and concerns;
- engage local and national organisations with a direct interest in the proposal;
- seek feedback on the proposal to inform the licence application and;
- raise general awareness of the project.

### 3.1 Target groups

- Local residents within postcodes PA29, PA30 and PA31
- Individual landowners/managers adjacent to the trial site and in the Knapdale area

- Community Councils
- Representatives of local, area and national bodies/organisations whose interests might be affected

Table 1: Stakeholder coverage

<b>Who?</b>	<b>How?</b>
Local residents	Leaflet mail drop, public drop-in day, leaflet and poster distribution to community hotspots
Landowners/managers adjacent to the site	Leaflet mail drop, invite to stakeholders' presentation or individual meeting
Community Councils	Stakeholders' information event, public drop-in day, opportunity for presentation/meeting
Representatives from organisations with local interests	Stakeholders' information event, informal and formal meetings
National organisations with an interest in the trial or the region	Letters, informal and formal meetings

Postal responses were sent to the Forestry Commission Scotland offices at Lochgilphead and forwarded to SWT for data collation. Online responses were received through SWT and RZSS websites.

As part of the consultation process, two key questions were posed to those consulted:

1. Would you like to see beavers in Scotland?
2. Would you support a trial reintroduction of beavers to Knapdale?

In addition, respondents were given the opportunity to write comments/questions on their consultation response.

## **3.2 Methods of consultation**

### **3.2.1 Face-to-face meetings**

A series of informal and formal meetings with different stakeholders and members of the project team (see Appendix A) was organised. These meetings included those opposed to the project as well as those near the trial site. Landowners/land managers adjacent to the proposed trial site and organisations which sought further clarification on the proposals were offered face-to-face meetings.

### **3.2.2 Events and presentations**

SWT's Members Centre for Lorn and Mid-Argyll hosted a public event about the project at Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory in Oban on 18 October.

A stakeholders' information event was held on 19 October at the Cairnbaan Hotel, Lochgilphead for some local landowners and organisations with an interest in the trial.

An informal public open day event was held on 20 October (10am – 5pm) at the Cairnbaan Hotel, Lochgilphead. The open day was widely publicised and people were encouraged to come and find out about the project, to discuss the proposals with the project staff, and to complete a consultation response.

### **3.2.3 Letters and mailings**

Letters were sent to a range of national bodies with regional or organisational interests (see Appendix B) informing them about the trial and the method of responding to the consultation (see Appendix C). Information was made available to regional offices and local staff invited to attend the stakeholders' information event on 19 October.

Letters with consultation leaflets and posters (see Appendix E) were sent to "community hotspots" (see Appendix D) including schools, post offices and leisure centres to help raise awareness and encourage attendance at the drop-in day.

The consultation leaflet, which also contained details of the public events being held, was posted to 2,897 households in the PA29, PA30 and PA31 areas (7% were returned as bad addresses).

### **3.2.4 Exhibitions**

A manned display was positioned at the Co-op supermarket in Lochgilphead for four days (21 – 24 October 2007). The public was encouraged to ask questions and submit their consultation responses.

### **3.2.5 Mini displays**

Posters and leaflets were sent to community "hotspots" highlighting the project and forthcoming public events.

### **3.2.6 Media relations and advertising**

To coincide with the launch of the consultation, local and national press releases were issued giving details of the proposal as well as dates and times of the events (Appendix F).

An advert was placed in the Oban Times on 11 October and the events were publicised in mailings to SWT and RZSS members.

### **3.2.7 Websites**

Information on the trial, including a question and answer brief, was made available on both SWT and RZSS websites and included the ability to submit the consultation response form online. The Q & A brief was developed in response to queries and issues raised during the consultation.

### **3.2.8 Response to further information**

Responses were made to those who requested further information (by email or letter) during the course of the consultation. The number of written responses totalled approximately 400.

## **3.3 Consultation criteria**

### **3.3.1 Ineligible**

SWT and RZSS staff and their families.

Members of the Beaver Steering Group.

### **3.3.2 Definition of Mid-Argyll**

Those within PA29, PA30 and PA31 postcodes.

### **3.3.3 Definition of Knapdale**

Defined by addresses in Tayvallich, Achnamara, Crinan, Bellanoch and Cairnbaan.

### **3.3.4 Definition of Knapdale neighbouring landowners**

With one or more land boundaries onto Knapdale Forest.

### **3.3.5 Void**

Letters without a completed consultation form or without a direct response to the two key questions.

No address or name supplied, or no specific answer to one or more of the questions.

### **3.3.6 Multiples at one address**

When two or more names on the form were from the same address, responses were counted separately i.e. one response per named person per address.

Every consultation response received was acknowledged either by email or letter (see Appendix G).

## 4. Summary of feedback

### 4.1 Overview

The project partners (SWT and RZSS) received an encouraging response to the consultation and the associated events. Out of 466 responses submitted by post or online, 374 were received from the Mid-Argyll area and 92 outwith Mid-Argyll. An additional eight responses were declared void due to duplication or incomplete information. Fifty-six confirmed they were either a member of SWT or RZSS. The number of responses was seven times higher than the previous local consultation.

#### 4.1.1 Public

##### 4.1.1.1 Event attendance

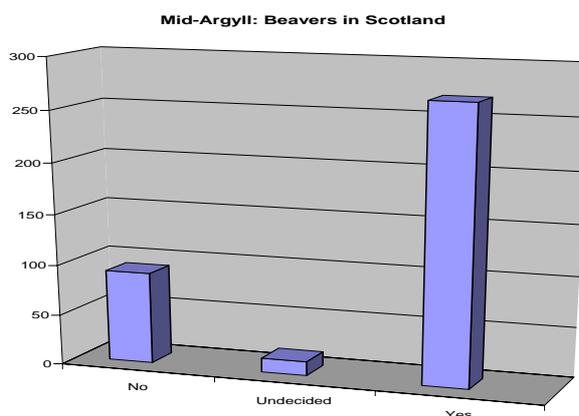
Public events on 18 and 20 October

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Members Centre event (7.30 – 9pm)	18 October	Oban	100
Public drop in day (10am – 5pm)	20 October	Cairnbaan	75 (estimated)

At the events, the project team was available to answer questions and discuss the project. People were encouraged to complete the consultation forms which were available. At both events support for the project outweighed objections; a trend that was reflected in the overall responses received formally (see details on the next page).

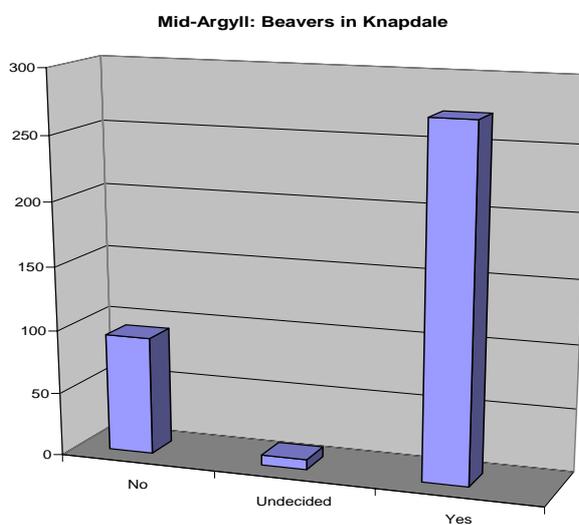
### 4.1.1.2 Mid-Argyll responses

Table 2: Would you like to see beavers in Scotland?



	Number of response	% of local responses
For	269	72.1%
Against	91	24.4%
Undecided	14	3.8%
Total	374	

Table 3: Would you support a trial reintroduction of beavers to Knapdale?



	Number of response	% of local responses
For	273	73.2%
Against	93	24.9%
Undecided	8	2.1%
Total	374	

### 4.1.1.3 Knapdale residents

Fifty-six residents living in Tayvallich, Achnamara, Crinan, Bellanoch and Cairnbaan responded to the consultation. This represents 8% of the population in the area (Census 2001).

Number of Knapdale residents who responded to consultation

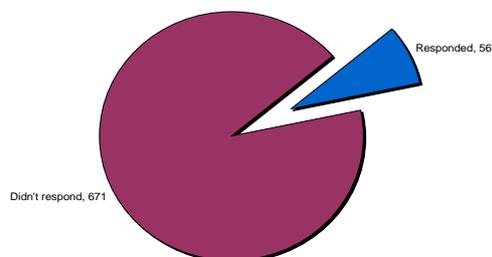
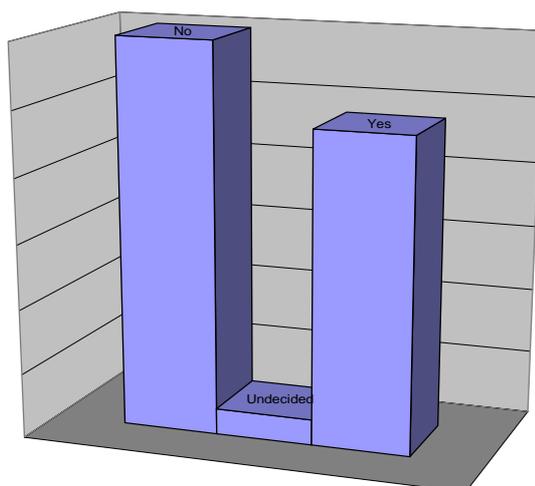


Table 4: Would you like to see beavers in Scotland?

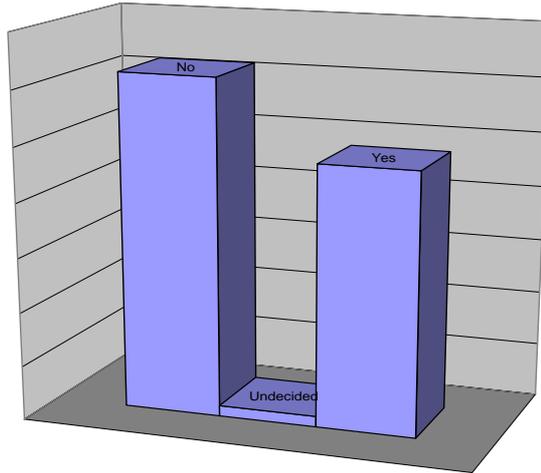
Knapdale Residents: Beavers in Scotland



	Number of response	% of Knapdale resident's responses
For	24	44.4%
Against	30	53.6%
Undecided	2	3.6%
Total	56	

Table 5: Would you support a trial reintroduction of beavers to Knapdale?

**Knapdale Residents: Beavers in Knapdale**



	Number of response	% of Knapdale resident's responses
For	24	44.4%
Against	31	57.4%
Undecided	1	1.9%
Total	56	

**4.1.1.4 Neighbouring landowners or residents to the proposed trial site**

Of the 39 neighbouring landowners contacted only 14 (36%) responded to the consultation. All neighbours received a letter inviting them to speak directly to the Project Manager about the trial (see Appendix F).

**Neighbouring landowners: Response rate**

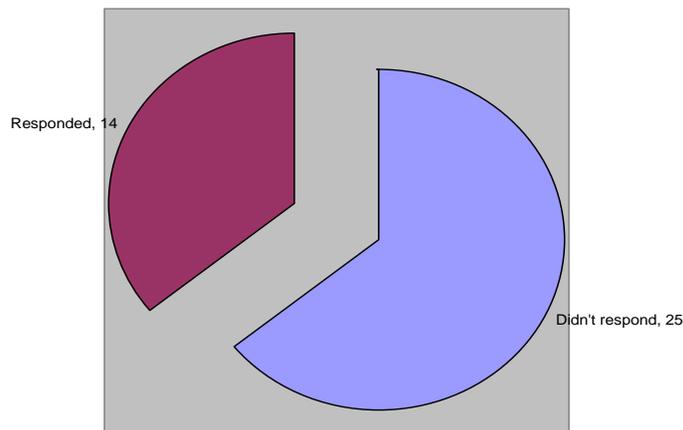
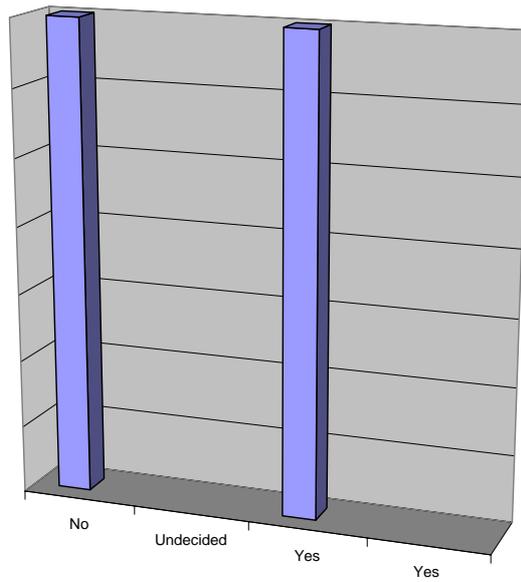


Table 6: Would you like to see beavers in Scotland?

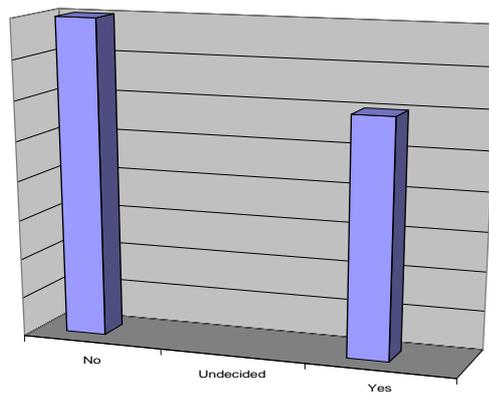
Neighbouring landowners: Beavers in Scotland



	Number of response	% of neighbour responses
For	7	50%
Against	7	50%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	14	

Table 7: Would you support a trial reintroduction of beavers to Knapdale?

Neighbouring landowners: Beavers in Knapdale

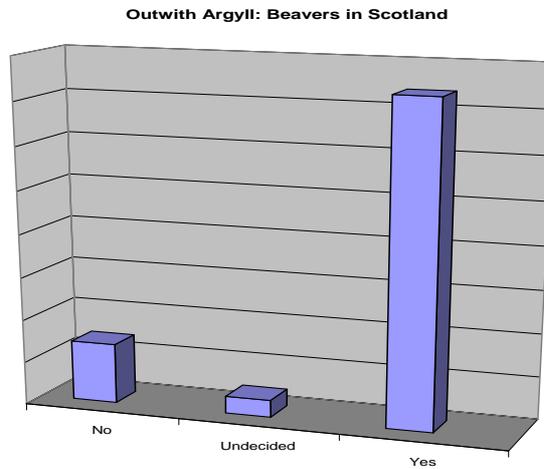


	Number of response	% of neighbour responses
For	6	42.9%
Against	8	57.1%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	14	

#### 4.1.1.5 Responses outwith Mid-Argyll

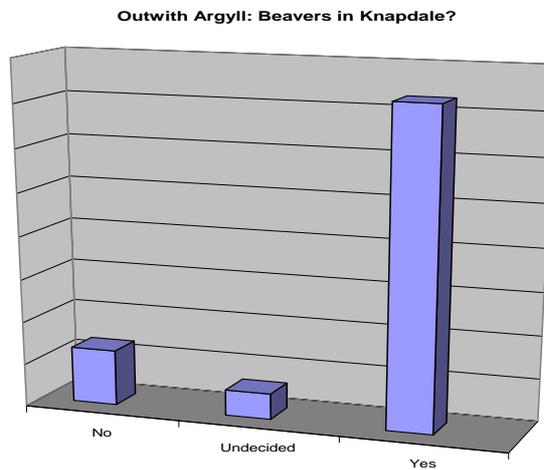
Inevitably a wide range of people outwith Mid-Argyll wished to express a view.

Table 8: Would you like to see beavers in Scotland?



	Number of response	% of specified responses
For	74	80.4%
Against	14	15.2%
Undecided	4	4.3%
Total	92	

Table 9: Would you support a trial reintroduction of beavers to Knapdale?



	Number of response	% of local responses
For	73	79.3%
Against	13	14.1%
Undecided	6	6.5%
Total	92	

#### 4.1.1.6 Analysis of public consultation responses

A significant majority of Mid-Argyll respondents (over 73%) were in favour of beavers being reintroduced to Knapdale and just over 2% were against the trial. Closer to the trial site views were more mixed.

Those in favour of the trial tended not to provide detailed comments supporting their preference; however, the comments received are summarised below.

Table 10: Analysis of positive Mid-Argyll public responses

Reason	Number	Details
Good for biodiversity	25	Enhance species diversity and wetland creation
Moral obligation	15	Extinct due to man, other countries have already reintroduced successfully
Good for wildlife tourism	16	Good for jobs, economy and tourism

Table 11: Analysis of the top 10 negative Mid-Argyll public responses

Most people who objected provided one or more specific reasons, summarised below.

Reason	Number	Details
Beaver reintroduction	40	Outright objection – no supporting evidence given
Resources	18	Money and effort better spent elsewhere
Existing wildlife/habitats	10	Potential negative impact on existing species and habitats, keystone species and interference with the current natural processes not required
Other introductions	9	Would cause similar problems to those resulting from invasive non-native species such as mink, <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> and grey squirrel
Not native	9	No data to prove beavers lived in Argyll and differences in the countryside since beavers were resident
Health risks	7	Concerns with of disease transmission including Giardia
Access restrictions and suitability of site	4	Concerns about possible access restrictions to and on the site. Knapdale not suitable or doesn't have infrastructure to support the trial.
Flooding/water supplies	4	Effect on water levels, drinking water and potential flooding
Consultation	4	Process, need for more research or confidence in project
Salmon/fishing	1	Potential risk of damage to salmon, impact on migration/spawning

#### 4.1.2 Organisations

At the stakeholders' information event on 19 October, 52 individuals including some local landowners, local groups and national bodies with regional interests, were invited to attend.

Neighbouring landowners who were not invited to the event were sent letters inviting them to speak in person to project staff.

Twenty-one attended. The meeting was dominated by those who were not in favour of the proposal and a range of issues to be considered in the licence proposal were highlighted (see Appendix G). Those who raised specific issues received, in writing, more information or clarification about certain aspects of the trial (see Appendix H).

Table 12: Summary of responses from organisations

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>View</b>
Argyll & Bute Council	Supportive
Argyll Bird Club	Supportive
Argyll District Salmon Fishery Board	Has concerns and would require safeguards to be put in place, supports AFT position
Argyll Fisheries Trust (AFT)	Has concerns and would require safeguards to be put in place
Association of Salmon Fishery Boards	Against and require clarification on issues raised
Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions	Supportive
British Waterways	Against and require clarification on issues raised
Confederation of Forest Industries	Against
National Union of Farmers Scotland (NFUS)	Has major concerns, wants clear exit strategy and safeguards in place
Ramblers Scotland	Supportive
RSPB	Supportive
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency	Has concerns and would require safeguards to be put in place
Scottish Rural Properties and Businesses Association	Against
Scottish Water	Has concerns (particularly post-trial) and would require safeguards to be put in place
Wild Scotland	Supportive
Woodland Trust Scotland	Supportive

#### **4.1.3 Argyll & Bute Council**

The Council recognises the potential benefit to the local economy and community and the potential to extend the biodiversity of Argyll. The Council has undertaken extensive sampling of water courses and water supplies within the release area which will help to serve to inform outcomes of the trial. The Council's Depute Leader, Councillor Robert MacIntyre, and Members of the local Area Committee all agreed that this would represent a positive benefit to the community.

#### **4.1.4 Argyll Bird Club**

At the AGM of the Argyll Bird Club (a community organisation constituted in 1985) held on 10 November 2007, discussion was held regarding the trial re-introduction of the European

beaver to Knapdale. The motion was strongly supported by the membership with request being made to write a collective response on behalf of the club.

#### **4.1.5 Argyll District Salmon Fisheries Board**

The Argyll DSFB works closely with the Argyll Fisheries Trust (AFT) which acts as its scientific advisor. The AFT has predicted the likely effects of beaver activity to be significant changes in riverine habitat characteristics and profound and significant impacts on fish and fisheries. Constant monitoring will be needed throughout this trial to assess the implications for fish and their environment, including riparian habitat. It is the Board's view that the AFT should be the lead body in making this assessment however it will require significant resources which should be factored in to the project costs.

#### **4.1.6 Argyll Fisheries Trust**

Concern expressed about impact on freshwater fish populations both within trial site area (limited impact for proper assessment) and should further reintroductions take place in other areas. Primary concerns relate to changes to riverine habitat characteristics and distribution of salmonid and other native fish that could in the long term change the distribution and productivity of a number of native fish species.

#### **4.1.7 Association of Salmon Fishery Boards (ASFB)**

ASFB raised concerns in relation to fish passage issues, habitat modification, environmental impact assessment, biosecurity and exit strategy. They felt unable to support the proposal without further clarification about certain aspects of the trial.

#### **4.1.8 Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions (ASVA)**

Recognises the potential benefit to rural economies as well as biodiversity. Beavers can only enhance Scotland's wildlife tourism product.

#### **4.1.9 British Waterways (BW)**

Despite being content with the previous SNH proposal in 2000, BW felt unable to support the proposal. BW's main concerns are with assessments of the risks to all potentially affected parties, proposed mitigation measures and residual risks following their implementation. They also stated concerns about the impact on canal structural integrity.

#### **4.1.10 Confederation of Forest Industries (ConFor)**

Objected to original application by SNH and continues to uphold this view. Consultation purely conducted on a local level whereas ConFor feels this is a national issue. Trial site is not a closed catchment. Application turned down previously on a number of grounds and not aware that any of these reasons have changed. Impact of other "introductions" and precautionary principle should be applied.

#### **4.1.11 National Farmer's Union Scotland (NFUS)**

NFUS was concerned about the economic interests of land managers who may be affected by the proposal and compensation must be made available to support these claims should the proposal go ahead. They felt that the beaver would be reintroduced to a "changed" environment after a 400-year absence. The proposal may have an adverse impact on other species, habitat and water environment. Should the proposal go ahead, a fully agreed and practical exit strategy/contingency arrangement must be put in place before approval.

#### **4.1.12 Ramblers' Association Scotland**

In principle, Ramblers' Scotland supports the concept of reintroduction of species to the Scottish countryside provided that this does not have a significant adverse impact on the natural heritage or public enjoyment of the outdoors. It must be carried out in accordance with IUCN guidelines, with the aim of establishing a viable self-sustaining population of beavers.

#### **4.1.13 RSPB Scotland**

RSPB Scotland has been involved with successful and popular reintroduction projects for red kites and sea eagles and believes reintroductions can be a valuable conservation tool. They believe the beaver is a clear candidate species for a Scottish reintroduction project and are fully supportive of a well-mounted and controlled trial.

#### **4.1.14 Scottish Rural Properties and Businesses Association (SRPBA)**

Introductions into the modern environment will necessarily impact negatively on a range of current land uses and practices. There will be potential negative effects on Knapdale Woods, which is a Special Area of Conservation. The protection afforded to *Castor fiber* under the EU law would render the SNH "Exit Strategy" either illegal or unenforceable. The period of the trial is inadequate to validate.

#### **4.1.15 Scottish Water**

Any controlled re-introduction of beavers needs to consider the potential impacts on public health and in particular the quality of drinking water sources. Scottish Water considers that monitoring of drinking water sources against a baseline level should be considered as part of the study to determine whether there are detrimental effects on water quality. In addition Scottish Water has concerns over the activity of beavers in affecting natural water flows in upland waters which may have a detrimental effect on water availability. These issues would be of particular concern if the trial was deemed a success and resulted in the proliferation of beavers across suitable habitats in Scotland.

#### **4.1.16 Scottish Environmental Protection Agency**

SEPA recognises the potential benefits of introducing the European beaver to Scotland's rivers and wetlands as an agent of biological diversification through, for example, storage of sediments, removal of nutrients and the introduction of woody debris.

There are, however, a number of uncertainties over the potential effects of beaver re-introduction which SEPA believes it would be wise to address before any decision is made about whether to re-introduce the species to an area of Scotland. SEPA does not, however, oppose the principle of reintroducing the European beaver to Scotland provided that the effects are closely monitored and that appropriate control measures would be implemented where evidence becomes apparent of significant undesirable impacts on, for example, hydrology or hydromorphology, natural heritage interests or riparian woodlands.

#### **4.1.17 Wild Scotland**

Watching wildlife is an important component of the visitor experience to Scotland and Wild Scotland actively encourages positive developments that provide wildlife viewing opportunities to visitors. Such developments should also provide opportunities for businesses, minimise disturbance to wildlife, and demonstrate and promote responsible wildlife watching.

The introduction of any species into the Scottish environment is a significant issue. It is therefore essential that any managed trial prior to re-introduction is carefully monitored and robust data gathered before any final decisions are taken.

#### **4.1.18 Woodland Trust for Scotland**

Supports this proposal as long as IUCN reintroduction guidelines are followed and that populations will be self-sustained with the need for prescriptive management of habitats for beavers. Should be seen as part of riparian restoration because beavers are architects of the wetlands and drivers of wetland natural processes.

## **5. Conclusions and wider considerations**

The overall results of the (fourth) consultation reaffirm that there is widespread local public support for a trial reintroduction of the European beaver in Knapdale (346 positive responses - 79% of these were from respondents in Mid-Argyll), and the project partners are encouraged

by the number of consultation responses (466), which exceeded those received in the earlier local consultation.

The majority of issues raised by respondents relating to the conduct of the trial will be addressed in the licence application and will form part of the research and monitoring of the trial itself. The project partners consider that the level of support is sufficient to justify proceeding with the trial and are grateful to all those who took the trouble and time to respond and for highlighting a wide range of issues.

The development and implementation of the project will continue to involve the local community and stakeholders, and mechanisms for this will be included in the licence application. Project staff will endeavour to achieve constructive relationships with all national stakeholder bodies with a view to ensuring that the proposed trial benefits from their experience and input.

## 6. References

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage (2007). *Species Action Framework. A Five-Year Species Action Framework: Making a difference for Scotland's Species*. Edinburgh: Scottish Natural Heritage.

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage (1998). *Research Survey & Monitoring Series No 121: Re-introduction of the European Beaver to Scotland: results of a public consultation*. Edinburgh: Scott Porter Research & Marketing.

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage (2001). *Appendix 2; Proposed trial reintroductions of beaver to Knapdale: Report on local consultation*. Edinburgh: Scottish Natural Heritage.