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SHORT COMMUNICATION

Invasive non-native species – the government view

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In May 2008, the three Great Britain (GB) Administrations launched ‘The Invasive Non-native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain’ (hereafter referred to as the ‘GB Strategy’ and viewable online at http://www.nonnativespecies.org/documents/Invasive_NNS_Framework_Strategy_GB_E.pdf) and in the joint foreword, ministers stated that their vision for its implementation was of a ‘...strong and broad partnership approach...’. This statement reflects the fact that this is very much a shared issue and that a very broad range of interests can contribute to tackling it.

The GB Strategy was commissioned by the GB Non-native Species Programme Board, developed by a working group comprised of representatives from both government and non-government organisations and builds directly on the recommendations in the comprehensive 2003 policy review report (<http://defraweb/wildlife-countryside/pdf/wildlife-manage/non-native/review-report.pdf>). A draft of the strategy was issued for public consultation in spring 2007 and received very high levels of support.

The core building block of the GB Strategy is the approach agreed in the second of a set of guiding principles on tackling invasive alien species annexed to Decision VI/23 of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). That approach is the so called ‘three-stage hierarchical’ approach of implementing prevention measures as the most cost-effective approach, followed by early detection and rapid eradication and, subsequently, longer term containment and control/management as necessary.

This approach forms the first three of the GB Strategy’s seven operational chapters:

- Prevention;
- Early detection, surveillance, monitoring and rapid response;
- Mitigation, control and eradication;
- Building awareness and understanding;
- Legislation;
- Research;
- Information exchange and integration.

The infrastructure now in place (or being developed) to oversee implementation of the GB Strategy and general policy coordination on the subject of invasive species is summarised in Figure 1.

The GB Non-native Species Risk Analysis Panel is already in operation and is supported by the GB Non-native Species Secretariat (<http://www.nonnativespecies.org>) through which risk assessments are commissioned from individual and objective specialists relevant to the species concerned. These are then examined by the expert panel and, when signed off, are summarised for the benefit of the GB Non-native Species Programme Board to help underpin its decisions.

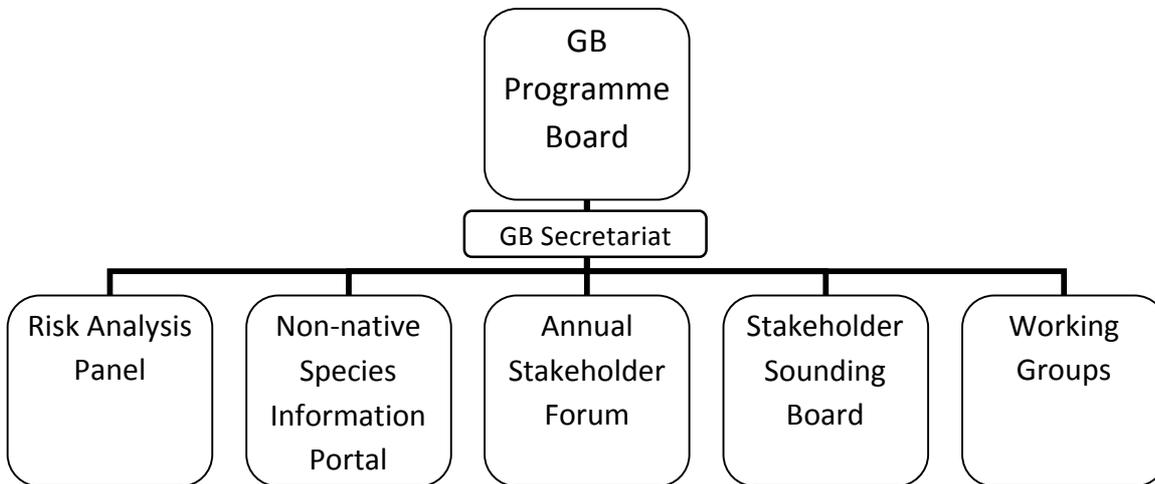


Figure 1. The infrastructure put in place to oversee implementation of ‘The Invasive Non-native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain’.

Development of the central data repository promised in the GB Strategy has now started and it will become a central point of information on non-native species in Great Britain. It will be called the GB Non-native Species Information Portal (GB NNSIP). The Annual Stakeholder Forum has been held over the last five years and is open to all interested parties.

The Stakeholder Sounding Board is a group of representatives from a small core of key bodies with whom the Board/Secretariat/policy leads can consider ideas or specific issues on an informal basis to help develop sound approaches.

The Board will establish (and close down) working groups as and when required to consider specific issues. The first working group was the Strategy Working Group and its work is now finished. Currently there are two GB working groups taking forward two specific measures set out in the GB Strategy. The Rapid Response Working Group is developing proposals for a protocol between government family organisations that will describe how they will work together to implement a rapid response to invasive species. The Media and Communications Working Group involves governmental and non-governmental bodies and is developing a plan to help ensure that communication and awareness-raising is carried out in the most effective way.

The Board has also requested that the GB Non-native Species Secretariat and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) examine the need for a marine working group.

The subject of invasive non-native species is large and complex and the GB Strategy provides a framework for a significant range of activities. Some of the activity recently completed, currently in hand or planned by way of implementing the GB Strategy includes:

- Working with the Biological Records Centre to develop the GB Non-native Species Information Portal (http://www.nonnativespecies.org/01_Fact_File/05_Fact_Sheets.cfm);
- A survey of public awareness and attitudes to non-native species issues in England;
- Research into the feasibility of taking action in respect of the Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus* population in London – a population currently very much smaller and more confined than that of the Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (Tayleur 2009);
- Research to examine what evidence there is of adverse impacts on native species arising from the presence of the growing Rose-ringed Parakeet population (Tayleur 2009);
- Research into the economic impacts of invasive non-native species in Great Britain;
- The finalisation of a well-defined risk analysis methodology;
- The commissioning of about 70 risk assessments, the first 12 of which have been completed and are now available for viewing through the GB Non-native Species Secretariat website: (http://www.nonnativespecies.org/04_Risk_Assessments.cfm);
- The commissioning of species identification sheets to provide a concise identification aid to assist projects and initiatives. Following positive feedback on the first batch, it is intended to build a library of them on the GB Non-native Species Secretariat website (http://www.nonnativespecies.org/02_Identification%20Sheets.cfm);
- The establishment of country-level working groups in Wales and England to compliment the group already established for Scotland;
- With support from the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra), the RPS consultancy organised a two-day identification workshop in June 2008 which was well attended and had a large range of plant and animal specimens available for study during the workshop.

Partnership working with a range of stakeholders will be key to success in tackling invasive non-native species. The 2003 policy review identified a clear vacuum at governmental level in terms of a national policy steer for stakeholders. The GB Strategy aims to fill that gap and, as part of the partnership approach, Defra has been pleased to support a number of local initiatives. Three of the most recent of these are those based in Wiltshire, Norfolk and Bristol.

The Government view?

The GB Administrations will continue to develop national policy and promote a GB approach as well as representing national interests in the international policy arena; for example under the CBD, within the European Union (EU) and in the other international conventions and agreements. They will identify and pursue priorities for action (jointly or separately) within a consistent GB framework and are also best placed to establish key strategic machinery such as the GB Non-native Species Programme Board, GB Non-native Species Secretariat, GB Non-native Species Risk Analysis Panel, GB Non-native Species Information Portal and, of course, the appropriate use and development of legislation.

The GB Non-native Species Programme Board itself will steer overall policy development implementation, and implementation of the GB Strategy and other key actions, for example, instigating specific governmental action against certain species. Through the government business areas represented on the Board, it will also promote

effective integration across some very large and complex policy areas, for example, across fisheries, biodiversity and plant health. The GB Programme Board will also seek to influence other relevant programmes as appropriate, for example, flood management, the Water Framework Directive and research programmes. Non-governmental stakeholders can now draw on the GB Strategy as a broad overarching plan for activity related to invasive non-native species. Complemented by the creation of the GB Non-native Species Secretariat as a hub, it is hoped that this will help generate opportunities for collaboration, promote more concerted and strategic action and help lever resources in the context of a national framework. Through greater awareness within the relevant community, it is hoped that successes and lessons learned will be shared and that, where possible, interested organisations will be able to align their programmes and projects with the GB Strategy and to work with governmental bodies to achieve more.

There is already evidence of this policy framework translating into real management action on the ground – both in local/county level management initiatives and by government delivery bodies. For example, to facilitate rapid and decisive action, the GB Programme Board asked the Environment Agency to undertake work to eradicate the invasive Water Primrose *Ludwigia grandiflora*. It causes major problems on the continent but is currently present only in small, scattered and hopefully eradicable amounts in this country. Control work to date looks very promising, but continued vigilance will be needed. With Defra support, the Environment Agency’s fish management team has also been undertaking targeted work to eradicate the invasive Topmouth Gudgeon *Pseudorasbora parva* from specific waterbodies. This programme of work will continue for some time yet, but the implementation of a targeted approach towards about 30 waterbodies is significant. The GB Strategy also provides a policy context for Natural England’s ongoing work to control American Bullfrogs *Rana catesbeiana*.

Great Britain is well placed in anticipation of an EU Strategy on Invasive Alien Species which was proposed in the European Commission’s Action Plan for the EU 2010 Biodiversity Target. The Commission’s thinking has also centred around the same CBD principles. It has also been considering the development of an early warning system for the EU, the issues of implementing appropriate controls on trade and other movement of goods, and how EU financial support might be used to fund specific action or multi-member state programmes. Other issues likely to need careful development include a risk assessment system accepted EU-wide as a basis for action and an agreed system for listing or classifying invasive species, in terms of appropriate policy responses and restrictions and the extent to which an EU strategy would require legislative underpinning¹.

Reference

Taylor, J.R. in press. A comparison of the establishment, expansion and potential impacts of two introduced parakeets in the UK. *BOU Proceedings – The Impacts of Non-native Species*.

¹ Since the date of the BOU Conference, the Commission has now published a Communication, setting out the policy options it is considering as a basis for an EU Strategy.