

Rt Hon. Steve Reed OBE MP,  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs  
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

*By email*

14th January 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

**Re: Wild beaver release licensing framework and national strategy**

We are writing to express our concern regarding the ongoing delay in publishing a clear licensing framework alongside a national delivery strategy for wild beaver releases across England. We are a collective of landowners, farmers, business leaders, nature and climate organisations, whose combined voice speaks for millions of people across the country.

As you are aware, beavers play a crucial role in ecosystem restoration, healthy watercourses, and supporting biodiversity - all of which are essential for a sustainable food system, our economy, and the wider health and wellbeing of society. They hold significant intrinsic value as a keystone species. However, the continued absence of a formal wild release licensing system and national reintroduction strategy for beavers is preventing much needed progress in restoring this native species to our landscapes and catchments, and realising their full potential as a critical nature-based solution.

Over the past decades we have seen growing public and scientific support for the reintroduction of beavers into the wild across England. The University of Exeter's ten-year study of wild-living beavers on the River Otter in Devon demonstrated the positive impacts these animals have had on drought and flood alleviation<sup>1</sup>, proving that beavers can once again thrive across our landscapes and contribute positively to habitat restoration, flood mitigation, water quality improvement, and biodiversity renewal. Other examples complement these findings, including a five year study at Spains Hall Estate<sup>2</sup> by Kings College London and the EA, and Puttock's 2017 study<sup>3</sup>.

The release of beavers into the wild in England, however, is currently hindered by the lack of an English wild release licensing framework and national strategy. Given that Defra has

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<https://news.exeter.ac.uk/centre-for-resilience-in-environment-water-and-waste/research-backs-beavers-in-fight-against-flooding-and-droughts/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/five-years-of-beaver-activity-reduces-impact-of-flooding>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969716323099>

already acknowledged the potential of beavers to contribute to the UK Government's legally binding biodiversity targets in the Environment Act 2021, the considerable support for action from within Defra's own expert agencies, and the fact that 69% of respondents to Defra's 2021 [consultation](#) on the reintroduction of beavers into the wild supported the proposed approach, it is vital that the department takes decisive action to enable the authorised release of beavers into suitable wild habitats across England.

We urge Defra to:

1. **Rapidly publish a clear licensing framework** that sets out the criteria for wild beaver reintroductions, ensuring that releases are done in a manner that is safe, sustainable, and in line with current conservation goals.
2. **Swiftly introduce a national strategy** for beavers in England in order to ensure national scale, integrated and strategic thinking around beaver reintroductions and existing wild populations.
3. **Work with key stakeholders**, including conservation organisations, local communities, and landowners, to ensure that wild releases are planned and managed effectively and that the application process, while robust, is not overly onerous and off-putting to those involved.
4. **Begin and accelerate the process of issuing licences** for the release of beavers into appropriate locations, enabling the benefits of this keystone species to be fully realised across England.

As you know, England faces significant environmental challenges, including biodiversity loss and the effects of climate change. We know the Government is committed to tackling these challenges, including the legal requirements of the Environment Act 2021 and Climate Change Act 2008. Reintroducing beavers to suitable habitats could be a key step in reversing some of these issues, particularly in terms of water management, soil erosion, flood prevention and species recovery. We must not allow further bureaucratic delays to stand in the way of these much needed positive outcomes.

We respectfully request that you take immediate steps to publish and implement the necessary framework and strategy to allow for the wild release of beavers in England. Our ecosystems and communities would benefit greatly from this important step, and it is essential that we act swiftly, not least to help meet the UK Government's climate and nature commitments.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to hearing from you, via [jess@beavertrust.org](mailto:jess@beavertrust.org) and [oliver.newham@rewildingbritain.org.uk](mailto:oliver.newham@rewildingbritain.org.uk).

Yours sincerely,

Sandra King, CEO, Beaver Trust

Professor Alastair Driver, Director, Rewilding Britain

Chris Packham, Co-Director, Wild Justice

Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife and Countryside Link

Martin Lines, CEO, Nature Friendly Farming Network

Ben Goldsmith, former Non-executive Director and nature champion, Defra

Harry Howell, Director of Land & Nature, National Trust

Will McCallum, Co-Executive Director, Greenpeace

Dr Robin Price, Director of Quality & Environment, Anglian Water

Dr Rob Stoneman, Director of Landscape Recovery, The Wildlife Trusts

Paul De Ornellas, Chief Advisor – Wildlife, WWF-UK

Michael Copleston, England Country Director, RSPB

Abi Bunker, Director of Conservation and External Affairs, Woodland Trust

James Wallace, Chief Executive, River Action

Dr Rose O'Neill, CEO, Campaign for National Parks

Clare Dinnis, Director of Wetland Conservation, WWT

Matt Larsen-Daw, CEO, The Mammal Society

Rosie Downes, Head of Campaigns, Friends of the Earth

Elliot Newton, Director of Rewilding, Citizen Zoo

Nida Al-Fulaij, Chief Executive, People's Trust for Endangered Species

Hazel Draper, Co-Founder, Wild Card

Paul Whitfield, Director General, Wildwood Trust

Dr Sean McCormack, Chair, Ealing Wildlife Group & Project Lead, Ealing Beaver Project

Kendra Walsh, Network Director, Conservation Collective

Amanda Keetley, Executive Director, Devon Environment Foundation

Andy Lester, Head of Conservation, A Rocha

Thomas Widrow, Head of Campaigns, John Muir Trust

Dr Mark Jones, Head of Policy, Born Free Foundation

Jim Foster, Conservation Director, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust

Archie Struthers, CEO, Nattergal

Lesley O'Mara, Managing Director, Michael O'Mara Books

Nick and Elena Martin, Co-Founders, Consano Earth

James Stafford, Head of Manufacturing, Republic of Music

Ben Horne & Joe Horne, Trustees, Lister Charitable Trust

David Woodburn, Trustee, The DRW Foundation

Dr Frederick Mulder CBE, Chair, The Frederick Mulder Foundation

Joe Ponte, CEO, Hotelplan UK

Anne Reece, Chair, The Reece Foundation

Stephen Dawson, Chair, Cobalt Trust

Becky Holmes, Lauren Gupta & Trustees, The Helvellyn Foundation

Sibbe Krol, Director of Sustainability, Bloom & Wild

Sophie Marple, Co Founder, Gower St

Caroline Marks, Chair, The AIM Foundation

Galahad Clark, Co Founder, Vivobarefoot

Jane Meyer, Chair, T&J Meyer Family Foundation

Lord Robin Russell

Bevis Watts, author of River Journey and beaver advocate

Kate Hitchcock, Senior Grants Manager, John Ellerman Foundation

Lynne Ashcroft Griffiths, CEO and Founder, AG Communications

Cc:

Mary Creagh CBE MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Nature)