

By email

04 January 2024

Dear Robbie Douglas-Miller OBE,

Re: Invasive Species

Congratulations on your new Ministerial role at Defra. Wildlife & Countryside Link, England's largest environmental coalition, looks forward to working with you.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) have a detrimental impact on our native biodiversity. The damage caused by invasive species and the number of INNS taking hold in the UK continues to grow each year.

The 2023 State of Nature Report found that controlling INNS is a vital and urgent conservation action for protecting species and habitats alike and the UK is committed under the 2022 Global Biodiversity Framework to halve the introduction of INNS by 2030 and reduce their impact on nature. Invasive species also take a toll on our economy, costing the UK economy at around £4 billion every year.

To tackle the problem, the Environmental Audit Committee recommended that the Government should increase the budget for tackling INNS to £6 million and establish a dedicated INNS inspectorate with similar resourcing to other inspectorates. We support these sensible and proportionate recommendations.

However, while there has been some progress over recent years this has been slow and piecemeal. We are concerned to note that INNS are still not receiving the same priority and funding as other animal and plant health biosecurity regimes, despite the clear environmental and economic benefits of further action. The lack of reliable, long-term funding, even for priority species in priority areas, is responsible for the growing number of INNS establishing in the UK each year.

To help to manage and eradicate INNS, Local Action Groups remain an incredibly valuable resource, as reiterated in the updated GB INNS Strategy. However, they too face prolonged challenges and uncertainties around future funding. Without long-term funding and resourcing for Local Action Groups, there can be no 'biosecurity citizens' army' to provide valuable contributions to eradicate INNS on the ground.

Unfortunately, numerous Government timelines for INNS have slipped, preventing effective biosecurity to be put in place at the pace that is needed. The publishing of Pathway Action Plans consultations has been repeatedly delayed, such that some of the Plans are now already out of date before they have been consulted on and approved. Similarly, the process of delisting & listing invasive species remains inefficient and should be reformed to deliver essential rapid responses to INNS.

Whilst the establishment of the INNS Inspectorate in 2021 was encouraging, they remain a small team of ten with limited powers and an undecided future. We are still waiting to hear whether funding for the inspectorate will be extended permanently beyond the current three-year trial, secured in 2022.

Reducing UK reliance on horticultural imports would make an important contribution to stopping the spread of INNS. Though there has been some progress in monitoring through the incoming Border

Target Operating Model, this remains a significant pathway for INNS to enter the UK. This includes not only plants themselves, but hitchhiker INNS travelling undetected within growing media. Banning growing media imports would bring us to the forefront of protective policy and in line with EU legislation.

This lack of progress on preventing and managing INNS risks undermining delivery of the Environment Act targets, including the target to halt the decline of nature by 2030 and target 6 in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to halve the rate of introduction and establishment by 2030.

As invasive species are a time pressing issue with introductions an ever-looming risk, we ask that you review progress as a matter of priority.

We would welcome a meeting with you, to discuss these issues further, and to explore how we can work collectively to ensure that this vital issue is addressed with the urgency that it requires.

Yours sincerely,

David Smith, Social Change and Advocacy Officer, Buglife, co-Chair of Link INNS Working Group



This letter is also supported by the following Link member organisations:



CC: Rt Hon Philip Dunne, Chair of EAC