



Press Release

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE DRAWS ATTENTION TO CONTROL OF INVASIVE SPECIES

During a day-long conference at Portcullis House in London organised by the European Squirrel Initiative, scientists, government agencies and conservation organisations debated the implications of the new Invasive Alien Species (IAS) legislation passed by the European Union. The recently-approved EU Commission's Invasive Alien Species regulation became law on 1 January 2015. It will lead to the Commission adopting an open list of invasive alien species of Union concern. Species on the list must not be introduced, transported, placed on the market, kept, bred, grown or released into the environment.

The day began with Francois Wakenhut of the European Commission briefing the 70+ delegates on the history of the legislation and its Guiding Principles. He explained that the legislative journey began in 2008 and that the new regulation now enabled the EU Governments to propose species of Union concern which would have an impact on individual Member States.

Trevor Salmon, Non-Native Species Leader at Defra explained the costly impact of Non-Natives on the UK economy citing a £1.8 billion pa loss. Salmon said: "Government's objective is to protect the nation's bio-security by responding to threats robustly where there is a case for doing so, and by putting effective mitigation or eradication measures in place where required. The focus must be on managing risks."

Stuart Moodie National Ecologist at Canal & River Trust, uses the River Lee as a case study for non-native signal crayfish. Moodie said it was an important waterway for public access that is now experiencing many environmental issues due to the huge presence of crayfish. The Trust has seen the habitat seriously degraded, with declining fish stocks and declining water quality. He argued the case for more innovative methods for control and early detection.

Dr Dick Shaw of CABI UK took the audience through a visual history of the damage caused by invasive weeds giving a global view. He examined the Japanese Knotweed problem which costs the UK economy £165 million per annum and shared examples of hugely successful bio-control programmes across the world that are working well and could be applied in the UK. He said: "A more strategic approach must be taking to invasive weed control leading to more scientific research and biological control. Great Britain leads the world in this area."

Dr. Craig Shuttleworth of the European Squirrel Initiative points to the direct impact of the growing population of grey squirrels in UK and Europe such as song bird predation, red squirrel extinction and tree bark stripping. But he also discusses the wider economic constraints saying: "Grey squirrel control works and it leads to red squirrels re-establishing themselves. We must take a long-term approach but it's a battle worth fighting."

The conference sponsors included Simon Hart MP, Peter Aldous MP and Richard Benyon MP.

George Farr, Chairman of European Squirrel Initiative commented: "ESI wholly welcomes the new EU legislation on IAS. It gives member states a real opportunity to tackle the Invasive problem. I also welcome the government's commitment to do something about the problem. IAS are a scourge that



for too long have been ignored. It is critical that we embrace this legislation and cure our country side before we are too late. We are custodians of our environment and have a responsibility to hand it over to the next generation in as healthy a state as possible.”

The new Regulation also covers invasive alien species of regional concern and allows member states to identify from their national list species that require enhanced regional cooperation. According to the EU, there are currently over 12,000 species present in Europe which are alien to the natural environment. About 15% of these are invasive and they are rapidly growing in number.

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Notes to Editors:

Photos of speakers available upon request

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