

ROMNEY MARSHES AREA INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Position Statement - Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*)

1.0 Summary

This document summarises the position of the Romney Marshes Area Internal Drainage Board (the Board) regarding Eurasian beavers (the species) within the Board's catchment area.

The Board recognises the ecological interest and public support associated with the species and acknowledges the potential environmental and flood risk management benefits in certain landscapes, but based upon case history there is a significant danger that the presence of the species within this heavily engineered catchment could at some point compromise effective delivery of the Board's function and increase the Board's operating costs. As such, the Board does not support the presence of beavers within the catchment whether from licensed releases, illegal releases or migration and is mindful of unintended consequences.

2.0 Delivery of the Board's function

The Board's function is Water Level Management which broadly comprises Flood Risk Management and water provisioning, both of which require full control of surface water storage capacity and water conveyance within the land drainage system. The Board exercises a general power of supervision over all matters relating to water level management and Board function is delivered through Permissive Powers under the Land Drainage Act (1991) and the Board's Byelaws. Effective delivery of function is dependent on the following factors:

- i) **Regulation** – Permitting of watercourse related works including the increase and decrease of flows (watercourse consenting), enforcement of the repair of any unsound riparian structure, enforcing the removal of any obstruction whatsoever, ordering cessation of any third party activities deemed to be at odds with delivery of the Board's function in any IDB adopted watercourse or Ordinary Watercourse, of which combined there are approximately 3000km within the Internal Drainage District.
- ii) **Maintaining capacity and conveyance** – The Board annually weedcuts 350km of adopted watercourses to ensure appropriate conveyance and storage capacity is maintained for water users, the sanitation of settlements and the maintenance of aquatic habitats. Safe access for maintenance, inspection and control is required at all times.
- iii) **Water Level Control** – The Board's 140 water level control structures are operated to provide appropriate water levels according to season, land use and prevailing weather conditions. Impediments to flow are removed as swiftly as possible.
- iv) **Extreme weather protocols** – Extreme weather is already placing considerable pressure on the land drainage system and climate change is predicted to increase the likelihood and severity of these events. Safe access is required to enable Board staff to proactively maintain a general supervision of the entire system with special attention to the removal of impediments to flow at structures, pumping stations and the open system at all times of day and night.
- v) **Incident response** – Board staff attend all reports including but not limited to, elevated water levels, water losses, control structure tampering, unconsented works, pollution, failing assets, and fish kills promptly.
- vi) **Planning and Development** – The Board actively participates in the planning process to ensure that all proposed development is compatible with the Board's delivery of function. Some of the Board's Permissive Powers are applied through the Board's watercourse consenting process. All works within Ordinary Watercourses require Board consent. All works within 8m whether over, through or under any adopted Ordinary watercourse; and all surface water discharges to any watercourse in the Internal Drainage District require consent also. Any activity with the potential to compromise any aspect of the Board's delivery of function requires the Board's consent.

3.0 Anticipated conflicts

Most of the discussion around the re-introduction of beavers in the UK has focused on the ecological and environmental benefits. However, there is also a considerable body of evidence documenting the damage that beavers can cause. Following reintroduction of the species in the Netherlands in 1988 the beaver population has expanded rapidly and dispersed causing damage and expense that is now rising exponentially across most of the Waterschappens. River Stour IDB (Kent) has experienced such costs following escapes of the species from licensed enclosures, with damage to pumping stations, water level control structures, banks and flood embankments which in some cases resulted in third-party losses. In the UK there is currently no mechanism for Flood Risk Management Authorities (including the EA) recovering costs incurred through managing the species or undertaking repairs to key flood risk infrastructure, flood embankments or watercourses.

The damage that can be reasonably expected includes, but is not limited, to:

- i) Burrowing causing instability of banks, berms, flood banks and key flood risk management infrastructure (including pumping stations), flooding and risk to health and safety of Board staff, land occupiers and members of the public, reduced access for annual maintenance and inspections, damage to crops and farmland and damage to aquatic and terrestrial habitats.
- ii) Damming causing impediments to flow, loss of control of water conveyance, upstream flooding, downstream drought, damage to marginal habitats and the refugia of protected species, silting of spawning gravels, reduced flood storage capacity, reduced efficacy of field drainage systems, increased emergency attendance requirements and increased manual handling (blockage removal).
- iii) Gnawing damage to wooden boarded water level control structures, the associated depletion of the water resource and potential downstream flooding.
- iv) Tree felling causing damage to tree plantations and riparian trees, creating marginal hazards to Board staff and possible impediments to flow that require removal.

4.0 Conclusion

The Board delivers water level management over a district of 30,000 ha with resources that are insufficient to also manage the added pressures that the species is liable to create. Despite the Board having powers to act in the removal of dams and repair banks (under Class Licence 51) the system is over onerous and does not provide Boards with any special dispensations. With no framework in place for the Board to recoup beaver related costs any beaver related works would have to be funded by increasing the agricultural drainage rate and the Special Levy paid by the Councils.

Mindful of the fiscal pressures that our ratepayers and councils are currently under, and the animal welfare issues that would arise from the conflicts that the species will cause, the Board considers that any release of the species, whether licensed or otherwise into this Internal Drainage District to be highly inappropriate.

This position statement was adopted by the Board on: 25/06/2026

Signed: D. H. Lovejoy

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Chairman of the Board

Date: 25-6-26

Signed: 

Print: R. A. MUDGE

Clerk Engineer to the Board

Date: 25-6-26