



Cornwall Knotweed Forum

Response to Defra's Consultation on the release of a non-native bio-control agent for the control of Japanese knotweed

The Cornwall Knotweed Forum's Management Board wish to make the following response on behalf of the Forum following consultation of its members.

The Forum welcomes the research findings, recommendations and this consultation and broadly supports the principle of release of a bio-control agent. We feel that it will be another significant tool for controlling this highly invasive species. However there are still some concerns that we would wish to see addressed:

1. Our first concern is one of publicity and reaction to the release. There is a real concern that people will say that conventional control is no longer necessary. This has already happened in our experience. At this stage we do not know what effect the release might have and how we might be able to, or need to, adapt practice. It is certainly too soon to stop conventional control methods. There will be many situations, such as brownfield development sites – a government redevelopment priority – where the organism will be of no advantage in the short term. There will need to be a strong PR programme to ensure that people do not relax their efforts to control Japanese knotweed. This must not be seen to be 'The Answer'. Additionally we need to ensure that we don't send the message: 'Don't worry about what we bring in. If it becomes a problem someone will find a solution.' Even if the Psyllid is successful and provides a good level of control there may still be high priority sites where traditional treatment is needed. In some cases e.g. *Heracleum mantegazzianum* with its close relationship to parsnip, a suitable organism may not be found.
2. We feel that more work needs to be undertaken to ascertain the impact upon conventional control methods. We do not want to be in the situation where control is compromised by the action of the Psyllid. What is the experience in Japan where control is needed?
3. There are uncertainties around the ability of the Psyllid to overwinter, particularly in relation to predicted climate change. This will need to be carefully monitored to see where and how it overwinters and to ensure that there are no unexpected adverse impacts.
4. Have any success criteria been set?

5. There may be some impacts upon the horticultural trade. However we feel that the serious adverse impacts that Japanese knotweed causes outweigh this likely impact, especially when you consider the plant was introduced without any sort of comparable risk assessment. The introduction of exotic plants to this country through the horticultural trade, with associated pests and diseases and un-assessed growth potential, arguably, pose a far greater risk in the long term to our ecosystems.
6. We feel that the geographical spread of the Psyllid needs to be monitored closely to see how fast and far it spreads so that early action can be taken should unexpected adverse impacts occur.
7. Control of any organism is always more cost effective in the earliest stages of its establishment. This release should not be seen as a reason to fail to carry out such early action as biological control relies upon an established population.
8. Classical biological control relies on the philosophical acceptance of other organisms within an ecosystem, with unknown long term developments in relation to long term effect.
9. Finally it is important that land managers consider the ongoing management of knotweed sites to ensure that they are not taken over by other NNIS's. In Cornwall we have strong anecdotal evidence of species such as *Petasites fragrans* succeeding controlled knotweed. This is a basic principle in invasive weed management which is often overlooked.

In conclusion we feel that the research work is sound and thorough. It has highlighted the risks and the likely impacts and that the judgement that the risk of unacceptable impacts is low is right. However we are still cautious in our response and would wish to see further work, especially through monitoring, to inform future practice.

The Cornwall Knotweed Forum would be pleased to work with Defra and partners to identify release sites and ongoing work.

Colin Hawke

Secretary, Cornwall Knotweed Forum

Tel: 0300 1234 202

invasives@cornwall.gov.uk

C/o Cornwall Council, Room 10, St Clements Building, County Hall, Truro, TR1 3AY

www.cornwallknotweed.org.uk

14th October, 2009



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

C/o Cornwall Council, St Clement Building,
County Hall, Truro, Cornwall TR1 3AY

Tel: 0300 1234 202 www.cornwall.gov.uk