Supplementary written evidence submitted by the Angling Trust

Lessons from the Thames Valley in Improving the management of floating pennywort in the River Kennet and Thames

Background

The invasive non-native plant, Floating pennywort entered the Foudry Brook, a tributary of the River Kennet in Reading, around 2008/9 following accidental spread from a lake in the nearby Green Park business campus. The plant began to rapidly spread downstream towards the River Kennet. Local anglers contacted the Angling Trust as they were highly concerned that the plant would enter the River Kennet and eventually the Thames. Despite calls to action, the Environment Agency were slow to respond to the seriousness of the threat. Some attempts were made by the EA to control the species, but these were piecemeal; restricted to small management efforts in particular locations rather than adopting a strategic approach and tackling the entire population of the plant in the Brook. Consequently, Floating pennywort had begun to spread into the River Kennet by 2015 and within two years was in the main River Thames with populations found as far downstream as Henley.

Budgetary constraints prevented a co-ordinated and sustained effort by the EA to eradicate the invasive plant, but in 2016 £140,000 was secured from Thames Water through an Enforcement Undertaking eventually approved by the EA, to manage Floating pennywort using local angling groups and contractors over a five year period. Again, the EA were slow to approve the allocation of these funds, due to a perverse interpretation of Environmental Undertakings.

The delays in obtaining clarification caused further spread of Floating pennywort down the River Kennet. Fortunately, in this instance, the misinterpretation of the Enforcement Undertaking was resolved before eradication of the plant became unfeasible. Since 2017 a strategic, coordinated response has ensued using local angling clubs and large and small contractors to prevent further spread of the species and begin to eradicate it from the Foudry Brook.

Movement towards a more coordinated approach

Eradication of Floating Pennywort in this catchment is ongoing, and presents a fantastic example of how through a dedicated budget, local groups can effectively coordinate a strategic, more catchment-based approach to invasive species management.

Without the involvement of local angling groups, and the additional funding which enabled contractors to fully clear the main areas and carry out follow up spraying and picking by hand, there is no doubt that by now Floating Pennywort would have travelled down the Thames and reached the outskirts of London.

Another two-year pilot has been sent up, bringing together local angling clubs, EA and other partners under the ‘The Lower Colne Catchment Floating Pennywort Management Plan’ (CVFC) with the objective to use a more collaborative approach to improve management of the invasive plant.

The Angling Trust recommends that:

1. There is a need for a dedicated budget to tackle Floating pennywort to ensure that a coordinated response can be sustained
The government is legally obliged to bring in an effective management plan to contain and reduce the impact of floating pennywort by the end of 2018. At present these plans are still not available in the public domain. The Angling Trust would urge the government to bring in this management plan in as soon as possible with the Environment Agency as a regulator, to ensure that there is coordinated and effective action across government departments.

2. Have a common position on Floating Pennywort across the EA business to ensure that the situation in the Foudry Brook is not repeated.

Timely action is essential to ensure that an invasive species is contained and removed before it can spread within a catchment. Therefore, there needs to be clear infrastructure and guidance within the EA to respond rapidly to new reportings of high-risk invasive species.

Video showcasing management of Floating pennywort in the River Kennet
https://youtu.be/abI2FEMBlwc

Other challenges not mentioned in the oral evidence

Need for funding to support the installation of wash down facilities

The number of anglers are considered low risk cleaning and drying their equipment after every trip, has increased from 21% in 2011 to 47% in 2018. The results from a survey with 3,540 anglers in 2018 indicated that the main barrier to uptake in biosecurity was the lack of wash down facilities present at sites. The Angling Trust asks that more funding is made available to support the installation of wash down facilities at local fishing clubs.

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