

News Release

Immediate Release

16 June 2026

Environmental Standards Scotland finds regulations fall short in face of growing threat from invasive non-native species

A report published today by Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) finds that the current regulatory framework does not meet the scale of ambition required to address the growing problem of invasive non-native species (INNS) in Scotland.

INNS pose a serious threat to Scotland's environment, economy and way of life. They are a leading cause of biodiversity loss globally, disrupting ecosystems, outcompeting native species and contributing to 60% of recorded global extinctions.

Across the UK the number of INNS has increased significantly over recent decades with rising numbers affecting freshwater, marine and terrestrial habitats. Examples of INNS present in Scotland include:

- **signal crayfish** which can cause significant impacts on native flora and fauna through increased grazing and predation.
- **American mink** which can have devastating effects on native biodiversity, particularly ground nesting birds and water vole populations
- **Japanese knotweed** which is a fast-growing plant that can smother native plants and damage fragile habitats

Despite action in Scotland to tackle the spread of INNS, ESS' report concludes:

- the regulatory framework is ineffective, poorly understood and inconsistently applied
- a more flexible and comprehensive range of tools is needed to support proportionate and effective INNS intervention, especially at scale, across multiple landholdings and for mobile species
- information on INNS control activity is fragmented and lacks consistent reporting at a national level. This limits both transparency and the ability to assess the effectiveness of INNS control activity

To make the regulatory framework more effective, ESS recommends that the Scottish Government:

- update existing guidance to ensure the operation of INNS control provisions is clear, understood and can be applied effectively
- bring forward proposals to strengthen and expand the range of regulatory tools for INNS management
- ensure data and information on INNS management is reported publicly in an accessible format to provide a clear national picture of activities and outcomes

Mark Roberts, Chief Executive of ESS, said “Our environment, economy and communities are increasingly at risk from invasive non-native species, yet our report makes clear that the current system is not equipped to meet that challenge.

“The Scottish Government’s ambitions for managing INNS are mapped out in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, the Scottish action plan for INNS and the new Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026. We now need action on our recommendations to ensure we have the regulatory framework in place to meet that ambition.”

A [2023 Scottish Government study](#) identified 30 invasive non-native species with a high risk of arriving, establishing and impacting biodiversity in Scotland within the next decade.

The Scottish Government must agree a plan, with clear actions, to address the issues identified by ESS within six months of the report's publication.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- i) Read the report in full: [Control and impact of INNS: an analysis of regulatory tools and approaches in Scotland - Environmental Standards Scotland](#)
- ii) The recommendations within this report build upon ESS' wider analytical work on the control and impact of INNS. In 2024 ESS ran a public [Call for Evidence](#) to gather views on how legislation and policy are working in this area. In February 2025, ESS published a [summary of responses](#), which highlighted that the Code of Practice is valuable but outdated. In October 2025, we called on the Scottish Government to review and update the [Code of Practice](#). In response, the Scottish Government has committed to undertake a review.
- iii) For more information, please contact: press@environmentalstandards.scot