**‘Threatened Species Recovery Actions’ Q&A**

**OFFICIAL**

*Below are anonymised clarification questions received by Natural England to date, concerning the TSRA Request for Quotation, and our responses to these. These have been summarised and grouped by similarity. Questions that are commercially sensitive or taxon-specific have been redacted. Square brackets indicate insertions for added clarity.*

**Q: Under section 2.3 of the RFQ, it states that the task should take around 30 minutes per species. Given that we believe that completing the task adequately will take more than 30 minutes, when evaluating quotations will NE allow some flexibility should more than 30 minutes per species be quoted?**

A: Our intention is to give a rough indication of the amount of effort needed to draft the actions. It is a guide and not a stipulation, and estimated as an average. Clearly some species will take much longer whilst for others, actions may simply be copies from other species - e.g. taxa with the same habitat requirements, or requiring similar mitigation of pressures/threats.

The 30m guide also reflects the overall approach which is rapid and expert-opinion led. We are not expecting very detailed actions – e.g. listing localities, or explanations of techniques citing scientific literature.

**Q: Under section 2.4 of the RFQ, there is guidance about eligibility for species based on the type of action needed. Can NE provide further guidance on how, when answering the eligibility questions, tenderers should address the situation in which there is low confidence that species recovery would be achieved by general habitat measures and pressure reduction measures?**

A: Whilst we cannot be certain about the outcomes of wider nature recovery measures, we anticipate a step change in delivery driven by the Environment Act 2021 (and secondary legislation) and the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). The eligibility questions provide a way of prioritising species for targeted recovery.

The decision over TSRA eligibility is not ‘set in stone’. For example, species considered out of scope now that in future fail to respond to widescale nature recovery, can have TSRAs drawn up at a time when these are updated/revised.

Furthermore, we do not want to be overly prescriptive here because each species is different, as are their habitat dependencies. We have not attempted to summarise all the targets and measures in the EIP that could fall in the ‘nature recovery’ category, so please consider those given as examples. We will be looking at the justifications for eligibility closely which should as far as possible be evidence-based, rather than overly precautionary.

**Q: Please could NE provide more guidance on how to populate the “Current SRC step” field in the TSRA template?**

A: We can supply [a copy of] the 2015 list [which includes Species Recovery Curve steps] but this only covers NERC Section 41 species. However, this will be out of date for many species, so a fresh look is needed.

The finalised [TSRA] template will include definitions of column headings which should help. The ‘Current SRC step’ is the main step for England – i.e. looking at the species as a whole, identifying the prevailing step nationally.

The purpose of using the SRC here, is to provide a means of evaluation but it is not a statutory indicator. We are looking to establish the baseline SRC step of the species at this time, whilst recognising that species can make progress on multiple steps, and occasionally regress – e.g. if new research indicates taxonomic uncertainty. Assessing SRC *progress* (not included here) will need additional guidance and criteria.

**Q: Under 2.4, penultimate bullet point, there is mention that actions calling for an alteration to national/regional policy or strategy, or for legislative reform, are not in scope. Please could NE provide more guidance on whether we should count as in scope, any changes to the implementation of national/regional policy, strategy and legislation (including scheduling changes)?**

**Q: Would policy-focussed actions be considered acceptable where these are specific to recovery (e.g., to support bespoke management through an agri-environment scheme or facilitate conservation translocations)?**

A: The focus of the TSRA project is to get details of **practical** actions needed for recovery/conservation. TSRA is not a means for calling for policy change, or variation in the way policies are implemented. Natural England and Defra need to understand the practical actions required and recovery constraints acting, to make/alter policy and ensure legislation is fit for purpose.

Note that a request to legally protect a species through the Wildlife & Countryside Act is in scope but would be subject to Quinquennial Review timing and procedures.

**Q: Could you provide a copy of the species lists?**

A: At present, the species list has just undergone QA within NE. It is expected to be ready for circulation by next Tuesday (22 Aug). We will send to all interested suppliers then.

The list is simply a compilation of the threatened (CR-VU), Near Threatened and Regionally Extinct (RE/EX/EW) taxa in NERR124 <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6315201438941184> (the spreadsheet contains the species list and is filterable), plus any additional Section 41 species that don’t meet these criteria (i.e. Least Concern, Data Deficient or not red-list assessed), available here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england>.

The finalised TSRA list will be de-duplicated, showing relevant Red List categories and whether S41 listed.

Data Deficient taxa are not in scope for actions but remain eligible for SRP funding.

**Q: Could you confirm/provide the drop-down lists from the template columns O, T, V, W?**

A: Sorry, these are still in development but will be ready before contracts are issued. Because the overall approach is for rapid assessment, the dropdowns will be simple categories. For example the draft categories for column O(Recovery potential / expectation) are:

|  |
| --- |
| * Medium-high |
| * Low - Constraints operating outside England |
| * Low - Extinction debt |
| * Low - Climate change pressures |
| * Low - Life history factors |
| * Low - Policy conflict |
| * Low - Relict or natural rarity |
| * Low - Combination or other (please detail in comments) | |

**Q: Could you provide a species specific example(s) of the expected level of bespoke actions (i.e. columns R, AC , AN)?**

A: We will draft some [Action Text] examples and circulate these early next week [w/c 21 Aug]. The focus of the TSRA project is to get details of practical actions needed for recovery/conservation. We are not expecting very detailed actions – e.g. listing localities, or explanations of techniques citing scientific literature.

**Q: Do you see any advantage to interested parties joining up with other organisations that cover different taxonomic groups?**

A: Yes, this may be beneficial but we would prefer to do this via NE hosted calls. We are planning a start-up call in Oct, and there will be other follow-up calls. These are mentioned in the RFQ, so do factor in some time.

Further comment: We want to cover as many taxonomic groups and species as possible over 23/24 but there is no requirement to cover higher level taxonomic groups in their entirety if this necessitates making joint tenders with other parties.

**Q: Will you consider tenders for single orders where they are relatively small numbers of species?**

A: We will consider tenders for smaller groups of species that are taxonomically based. However, our aim is to be as comprehensive as possible, so cover as many groups as we can over 23/24.

Further comment: We will also consider other themed groupings, e.g. ecological, functional, or habitat based, although our preference is for taxonomic.

**Q: TSRA template commercial response template/costings – how are you expecting these to be evidenced?**

A: There is no need to evidence costings. These are entirely up to you, based on your organisational needs/standards. It is a competitive tender, based partly on cost.

**Q: You have requested a completed Mandatory Requirements (Annex 1) and Acceptance of Terms and Conditions (Annex 2) but both are included from page 28 of the Request for Quotation document, not as separate documents. Therefore, do we just complete these within that document and submit as a whole?**

A: Please return the RFQ as a whole document as part of your quote. The RFQ becomes part of the contract for successful tenderers.

**Q: Now that the workshops are to take place in Q1 of 2024/25; how certain are you of funding being available for these and would we be preparing a separate quotation for these next year? Could this perhaps be covered by 4.1 in the terms and conditions document?**

A: We can’t commit to 24/25 funding yet but given this project will be a continuation, we are hopeful that the Species Recovery Programme will fund. This would mean a separate quote and new contract for 24/25.

**Q: Did you send the invitation to organisations/individuals linked to taxonomic groups?**

A: Yes, we have focussed on organisations/individuals with expertise for particular groups but there is no expectation that tenderers will confine themselves to these – i.e. we anticipate tenders for the same work (groups) and encourage this. So it is very much dependent on the expertise you have available.

**Q: Do you have a definition of ‘recovered’? A species whose English population has increased year-on-year for the past decade may not have reached former population levels. Similarly, in some cases these species, or species which have stable populations, will be dependent on ongoing interventions and may risk reversal if actions are stopped. In this context, is it accepted that in some cases recovery actions may still need to be defined for species that are increasing or stable to secure/maintain recovery?**

A: The species eligibility questions provide a way of prioritising species for targeted recovery and aim to maximise contributions to the species extinction risk target. For example, a Least Concern species that isn’t declining and stands to benefit from wider nature recovery efforts may not be a priority for targeted action.

We do recognise the importance of conservation dependency which can be reflected in the current Species Recovery Curve (SRC) step chosen. The SRC provides a flexible way for evaluating progress and includes step 8 for Species recovering, and step 9 for Species recovered - target achieved. Assessing SRC *progress* (not included here) will need additional guidance and criteria. Work is underway to provide more detailed definitions of the steps but is not available yet.

**Q: Would species that have IUCN LC status and are also not S.41 species be within scope for inclusion if considered appropriate?**

A: No, these species are not in scope. However, if [a Least Concern species] were to become Near Threatened or threatened in future (at the next IUCN RL assessment), it could have TSRAs drawn up at a time when these are updated/revised.

**Q: The RFQ asks for the “number of species you will be addressing in your tender”. Is this the number of species once tested against the two eligibility questions, or the base list prior to the test of whether recovery actions are required?**

A: It is the latter (base list). We appreciate that deciding which species qualify [against the eligibility questions] will take time and are not asking to pre-empt these decisions.

**Q: Regarding difficulties over estimating the time requirements, what percentage of species will qualify for detailed actions?**

A: Whilst we cannot pre-empt that, NE has done some analysis across taxonomic groups based on a random sample of GB threatened and Near Threatened species. This showed that only 35% of actions (393 of 1131) are species-specific (TSRA definition).

Further comment: Bespoke species measures (targeted actions, including site re/introductions and reinforcement) were considered key to recovery of over 40% of species. These measures were important for over 60% of invertebrates, 50% of herptiles, and 42% of mammals. About one third of birds and plants also benefited (Defra 2022). This study was based on the expert opinion of Natural England species specialists. Note however that the definition of ‘bespoke’ used here was narrower than ‘species specific’ used in TSRA.

**Q: Could Natural England carry out the species list filtering work [eligibility questions]?**

A: NE do not have the capacity for this which is one of the reasons why the work is going out to tender. Moreover, we want this to be a joint venture with partners. NE species specialists will be involved in the 2024 workshops and QAing the actions.

**Q: Is the intention for the workshops to allow an effective QA of all [proposed actions] with experts?**

A: Yes, although we recognise that we can't workshop every single species, so the workshops will be structured around groups of species and getting consensus on which species to cover. Plans for the workshops are still being developed.

Further comment: we have run similar workshops in the past for Section 41 species and these have been very productive.

**Q: Will TSRA have confidence levels assigned to certain fields?**

A: No, we will not be adding confidence levels [additional fields] to the template. The aim is for a rapid exercise based on expert opinion. This is in contrast to the Species Evidence Base (SEB) project where it will possible to apply a [subjective] confidence rating.

**Q: What level of detail are you expecting in the Actions text? Something comparable to the Section 41 actions?**

A: Further information on the wording of actions and some examples will be circulated as soon as possible.

Actions should be succinct but with sufficient detail for understanding and implementation by a practitioner. Some justification within actions is acceptable. Avoid combining two or more actions into one - e.g. where they concern different Recovery Curve steps. [It is not acceptable to conflate two or more unrelated actions into one, such as a project with multiple elements.]