

Current status of INNS LAGs in GB

Introduction

Policy and Legislation

It is widely accepted that one of the most serious threats to biodiversity worldwide is posed by invasive non-native species (INNS). In recognition of this fact, and following on from commitments and obligations in various international agreements, Great Britain was an early leader in Europe in acting to address the problem. With the UK working to meet the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) relating to INNS and the recent adoption of the EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species, the issue continues to be a high priority for Government.

A revised GB Invasive Non-native Species Strategy was published in August 2015 which replaces the original Strategy published in 2008, and sets out the high-level objectives and key actions to enhance the management of INNS in GB. The overarching aim of the Strategy is to:

“minimise the risk posed by, and reduce the negative impacts of, INNS in GB.”

The Strategy follows the Convention for Biological Diversity hierarchical approach stressing prevention, followed by early detection and rapid response and finally long-term management and control.

Partnership working across different levels – national, regional and local – is seen as key to implementing the Strategy.

Local Action Groups

In many areas of the country Local Action Groups (LAGs) have been set up by local organisations and volunteers to lead work on INNS in their locality. LAGs were not explicitly mentioned in the original Non-native Species Framework Strategy for GB, but the informal network of LAGs that developed proved a valuable resource in supporting the delivery of several key actions contained in the original GB Strategy. This has led them to be recognised more formally in the 2015 Strategy – being featured as a Case Study in the Chapter focussing on long-term management and control. LAGs are also uniquely well placed to support Government in delivering Key Action 5.6 in the new Strategy which aims to ‘improve ways of supporting strategic local action’.

LAGs have also played an important role in helping to meet targets under the WFD, with 29 LAGs receiving funding from Defra to carry out activities specifically designed to help meet WFD requirements.

Aim

The aim of this project was to rapidly assess the current status of LAGs in GB (not restricting the research just to those that have received Defra funding in the past), with a particular focus on:

- The financial ‘health’ of the LAG network;
- Whether the types of activities undertaken by LAGs in the past differ from their future priorities;
- The current level of co-operation and collaboration across the LAG network.

Methodology

It was agreed that the most effective and efficient way to collect the information required to achieve the project’s aim was through an online survey. Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) was used to put together the survey as it offers a low cost and flexible option. The questions were

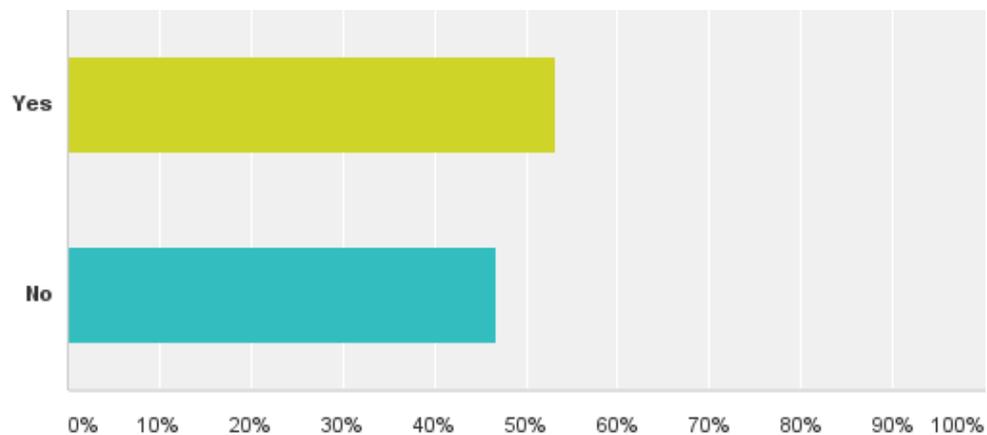
formulated by the National LAGs Co-ordinator, based at APHA, working closely with Defra's Non-native & Protected Species Policy Team. Once the questions were agreed and the response collector page designed an e-mail was sent to all the LAGs on the GBNNSS mailing list. The survey was also promoted through other means, such as the LAGs eBulletin.

Results

The link to the online survey was sent to the GBNNSS' LAGs mailing list that contains 126 e-mail addresses (although others may have become aware of it through other means or been passed the link to complete the survey by a colleague), with 30 LAGs returning the completed survey. A further 2 LAGs filled in part of the survey but failed to complete it, these have been removed from the data.

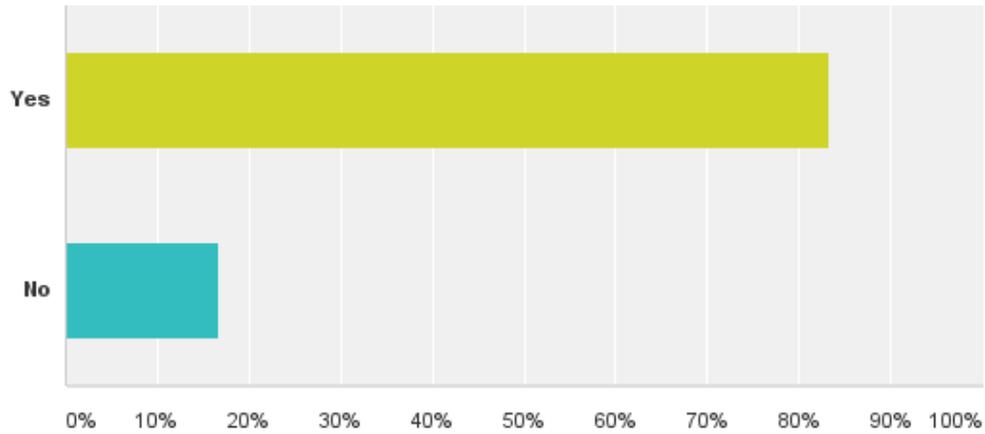
A summary of the results is presented below, with the full results presented in Appendix 1.

Did your LAG receive funding from Defra at any time between 2011 and 2015?



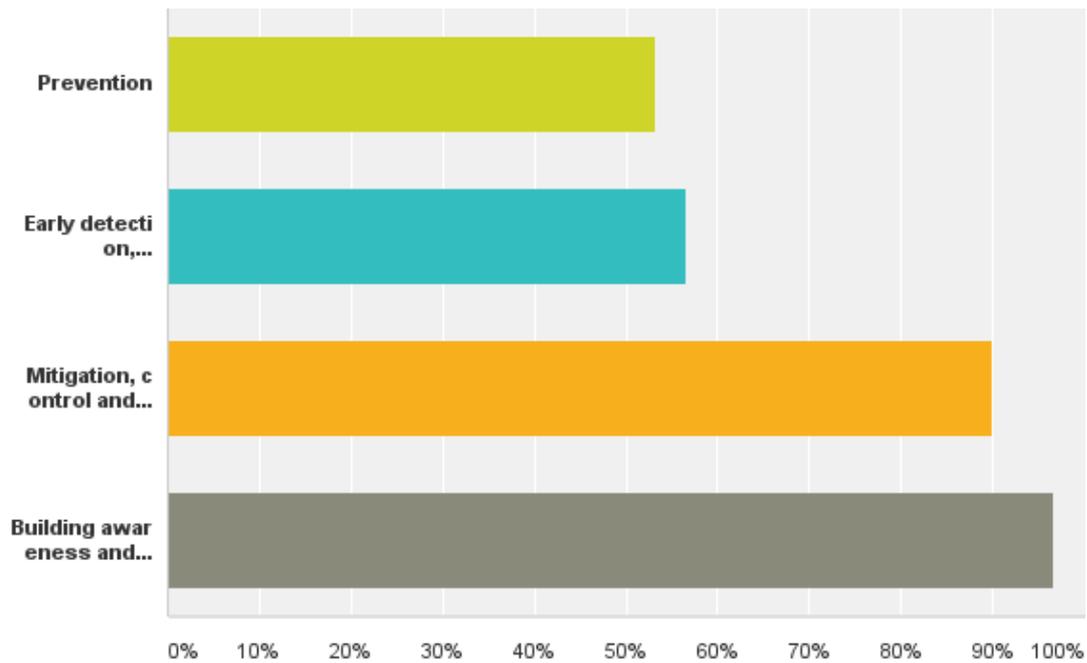
| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Yes | 53.33% | 16 |
| No | 46.67% | 14 |
| Total | | 30 |

Has your LAG received funding from any bodies other than Defra?



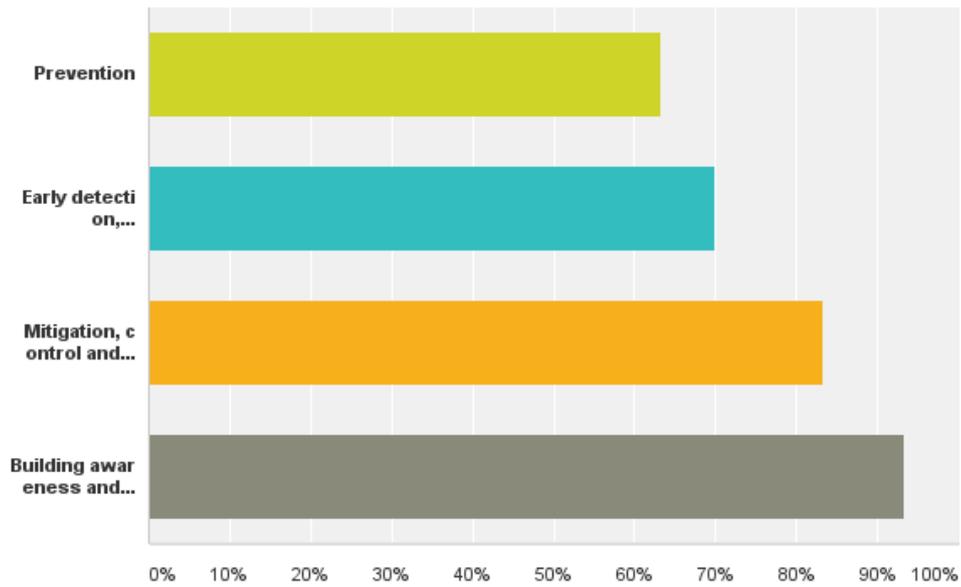
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|--------------|--------|-----------|
| Yes | 83.33% | 25 |
| No | 16.67% | 5 |
| Total | | 30 |

What have been the main areas of work for your LAG in the past?



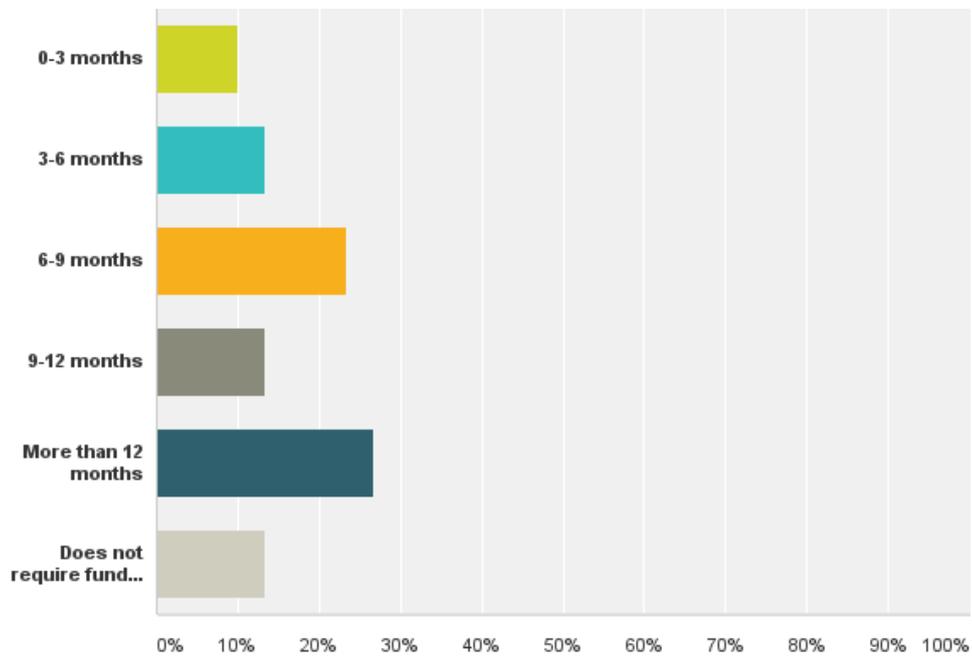
| Answer Choices | Responses |
|--|-----------|
| Prevention | 53.33% 16 |
| Early detection, surveillance, monitoring and rapid response | 56.67% 17 |
| Mitigation, control and eradication | 90.00% 27 |
| Building awareness and understanding | 96.67% 29 |
| Total Respondents: 30 | |

What do you perceive to be the main areas of work for your LAG in the future?



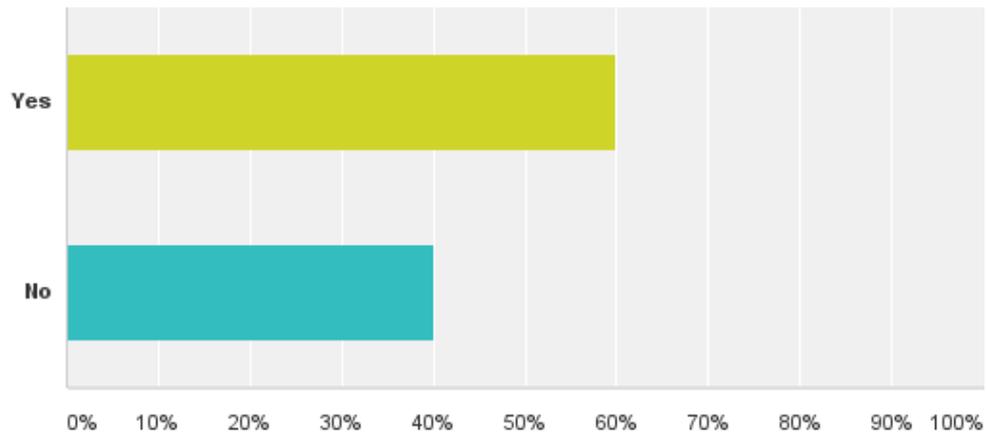
| Answer Choices | Responses |
|--|-----------|
| Prevention | 63.33% 19 |
| Early detection, surveillance, monitoring and rapid response | 70.00% 21 |
| Mitigation, control and eradication | 83.33% 25 |
| Building awareness and understanding | 93.33% 28 |
| Total Respondents: 30 | |

How long will your LAG be able to operate in its current form with funding previously secured?



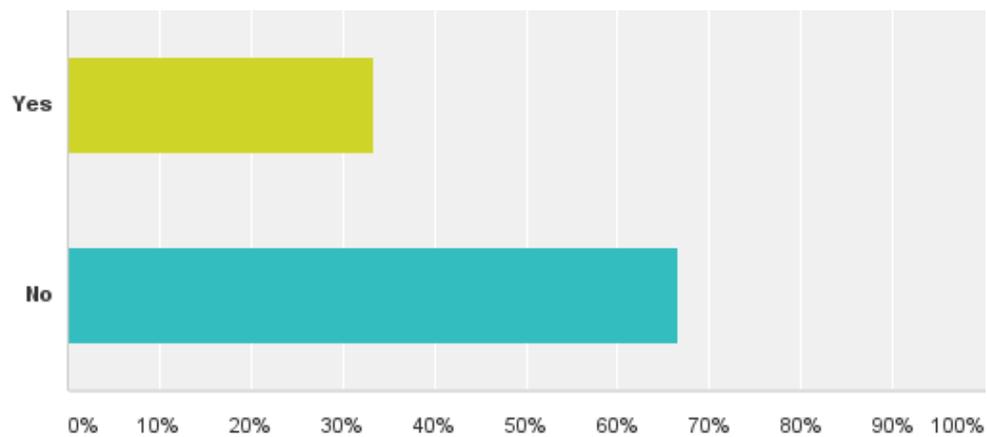
| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-----------|
| 0-3 months | 10.00% | 3 |
| 3-6 months | 13.33% | 4 |
| 6-9 months | 23.33% | 7 |
| 9-12 months | 13.33% | 4 |
| More than 12 months | 26.67% | 8 |
| Does not require funding to operate | 13.33% | 4 |
| Total | | 30 |

Are you planning to apply for funding to support the work of your LAG in the near future?



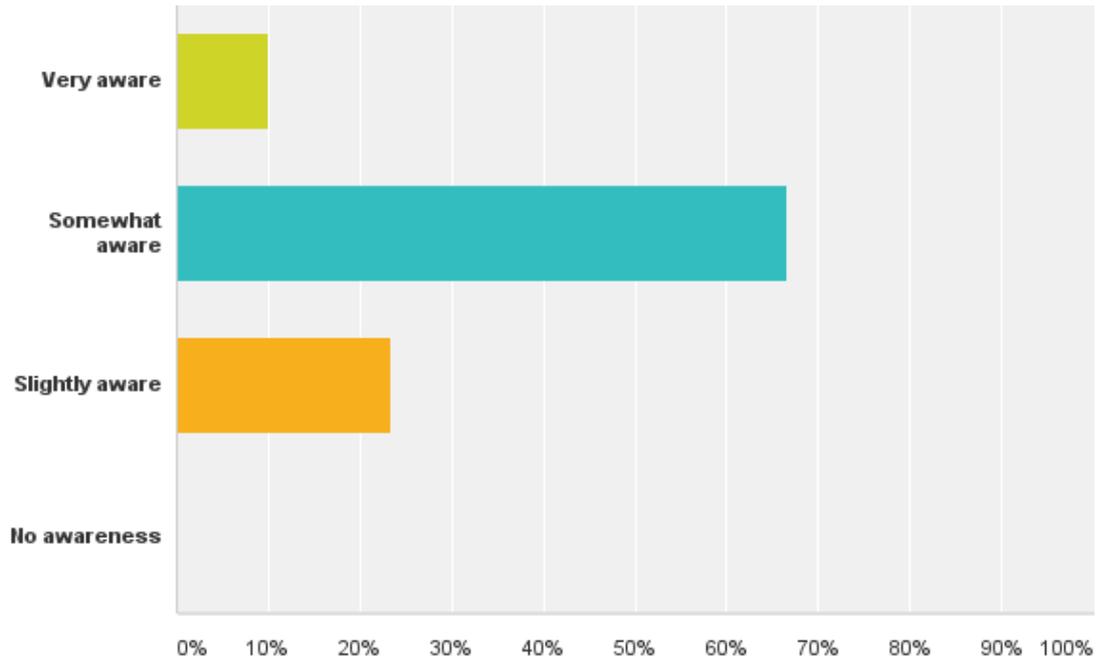
| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Yes | 60.00% | 18 |
| No | 40.00% | 12 |
| Total | | 30 |

Are you currently waiting to hear the outcome of any funding bids to support your LAG?



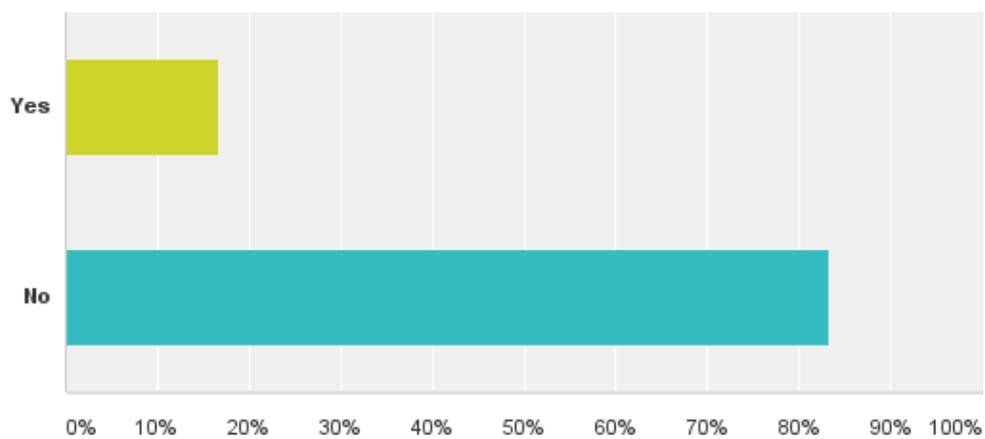
| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Yes | 33.33% | 10 |
| No | 66.67% | 20 |
| Total | | 30 |

How aware are you of the activities of other LAGs across GB?



| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Very aware | 10.00% | 3 |
| Somewhat aware | 66.67% | 20 |
| Slightly aware | 23.33% | 7 |
| No awareness | 0.00% | 0 |
| Total | | 30 |

Have you worked collaboratively with other LAGs to deliver joint projects or submit joint funding bids?



| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Yes | 16.67% | 5 |
| No | 83.33% | 25 |
| Total | | 30 |

Analysis and Discussion

Almost 50% of the LAGs that responded to our survey had not received funding from Defra. When those LAGs that work exclusively in Wales or Scotland (and so are ineligible for Defra funding) were removed from the results the proportion reduces but remains quite high at 36%. This means that more than a third of the LAGs in England that responded to our survey have not received any financial support from Defra in the last 4 years (which encompasses the last two tranches of WFD funding that were made available to LAGs). In contrast to this the vast majority of LAGs (83%) have received funding from sources other than Defra. Some of the alternative funders most commonly listed by the LAGs were Natural England, the Environment Agency, Local Authorities, Interreg and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). In the past Defra has encouraged LAGs to utilise other funding streams and our results suggest that the vast majority of LAGs have been able to do this to some degree. Interestingly 17% of the survey respondents reported not receiving any funding to support their activities.

Despite the generally positive conclusions that could be drawn from the survey's first two questions, with the majority of LAGs operating under a mixed funding model utilising funders other than central government, only 40% report that they have already secured sufficient funding to continue operating in their current form beyond the next 12 months or that they do not require any funding to operate. Of most concern is that 13% of LAGs report that they have not secured funding to operate beyond the next 6 months and 10% of LAGs have not secured funding to operate beyond the next 3 months (the survey was sent to LAGs at the end of June 2015, so this indicates that they will cease to operate in their current form in September 2015). Of these two groups that are at most risk, 67% have received some form of Defra funding over the last 4 years. This suggests that although LAGs have taken steps to utilise new funding streams many remain financially vulnerable.

60% of the LAGs that responded to our survey are planning to bid for funding in the near future. 33% having already submitted funding bids and are awaiting the result of those bids. Almost all (90%) of the LAGs that have already submitted bids are also planning to submit bids in the future, indicating that they have contingency plans in place should their initial bids be unsuccessful. Of the LAGs that have received funding from Defra in the past, 69% have either submitted a funding bid or are planning to do so in the near future (or both), compared with 57% of non-Defra funded LAGs. However, when you take in to account that 21% of the LAGs that have never received funding from Defra also report not requiring funding to operate then this actually means that 78% of the non-Defra funded LAGs are putting plans in place to ensure that they can continue their activities in the future. The types of potential funder being approached by LAGs are largely similar to those used in the past.

Our results also suggest that LAGs are changing the areas of work that they focus on. 63% of LAGs report that they anticipate undertaking work to prevent the establishment of INNS in the future, whereas only 53% have done so in the past. There also seems to be an increasing number of LAGs aiming to undertake work on early detection, monitoring and rapid response. While only 57% have done this in the past, 70% aim to work in this area in the future. Our results suggest a small decrease in the number of LAGs undertaking work to mitigate, control and eradicate INNS whilst the number of groups reporting that they will undertake work to build awareness and understanding in the future remains broadly similar (and will still remain the largest area of work for LAGs in to the future). This shift broadly mirrors that of the new GB Non-native Species Strategy, which also highlights the importance of additional resources being invested in preventing the establishment of novel INNS.

Survey respondents generally reported having a good awareness of the activities of other LAGs, with 77% reporting either being 'very aware' or 'somewhat aware'. The fact that no respondents considered themselves to have 'no awareness' is reassuring, although the general awareness of the activities of other LAGs does not appear to have led to a corresponding increase in collaborative working between LAGs, with only 17% of LAGs having worked collaboratively in the past.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of our survey indicate that the vast majority of LAGs are striving to continue their work, with some refocussing their activities away from those carried out in the past. Although the majority of LAGs that require funding to operate are secure or are currently seeking alternative sources of funding, there is a risk that some LAGs will cease to function in their current form before alternative funding sources can be secured.

Our results highlight that LAGs undertake a wide range of activities related to INNS management. The vast majority of these activities directly support or compliment the key actions outlined in the new GB Non-native Species Strategy. LAGs have also attracted funding from a wide range of sources that may not otherwise have funded activities to manage INNS.

In particular the results of our survey have highlighted the vast breadth of experience accrued by LAGs, both in delivering a wide-range of activities and also in bidding to a huge range of funders. The LAGs responding to our survey also cover a wide geographical area and the network now extends in to every region of England.

One factor that may limit the future success of the LAG network is the current lack of collaborative working. Although knowledge of the activities of other LAGs in GB is quite high, this has not led to substantial co-operation between LAGs. As has been highlighted by the results of this study, when taken as a whole the LAG network has a huge amount of experience in delivering projects and securing funding, but this varies greatly between individual LAGs. By encouraging and supporting LAGs to work more closely together the full potential of this experience could be realised.

One possible factor contributing to the current lack of collaboration is the way in which funding was administered by Defra in the past, where LAGs were forced to compete against each other with no benefit to be gained by working together. Whilst funding from Defra was valuable (several LAGs have reported that the funding provided by Defra allowed them to undertake activities that it would otherwise have been very difficult to fund through other sources) it may have fostered a culture of competition rather than collaboration. If we want a more robust and collaborative LAG network then any future nationally administered funding schemes to support INNS LAGs should ensure that LAGs benefit from working together. This would also potentially unlock efficiency savings by the pooling of knowledge and resources to deliver joint projects on issues of mutual interest (ie. developing and delivering joint training workshops, working with neighbouring LAGs to develop regional INNS black lists etc.)