



9 March 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

## RE: Response to the UK Pest Risk Analysis (PRA) for *Litylenchus crenatae*

Thank you for submitting views on the draft UK Pest Risk Analysis for *Litylenchus crenatae*. This letter is to notify you of the outcome.

### Recommendations

The UK Plant Health Risk Group (PHRG) review presented the following recommendation:

Statutory action be taken on any findings of *Litylenchus crenatae*, and consideration be given to addressing open pathways relating to imports of plants for planting and plant parts.

This PRA will also be used by the EPPO Phytosanitary Measures panel to help determine if EPPO should recommend *Litylenchus crenatae* for regulation as a quarantine pest.

### Background

*Litylenchus crenatae* is a nematode pest and causative agent of beech leaf disease (BLD) in Japan, Canada and the US. Since the detection of beech leaf disease in the USA in 2012, this foliar nematode pest has spread quickly across beech (*Fagus*) forests in North America where it is causing significant environmental damage. There can be a high disease incidence in infected areas causing concern about the impacts to ecosystems resulting from its establishment, and about possible future economic impact in American beech timber production valued for flooring, veneer and furniture. The mortality rate is generally higher on smaller trees, but large trees can die after a number of years, suggesting cumulative effects.

The PRA has considered pathways involving plants for planting, imported plant parts such as branches, wood with bark, seeds, contamination on clothing, footwear or baggage and natural spread. Most pathways are considered very unlikely, though with some uncertainty due to lack of knowledge. However, the greatest risk is associated with the import of plants

for planting from areas where the pest is present, even though this is partially mitigated by current legislation.

This PRA shows that relevant hosts are widely distributed across the UK and wider EPPO region. Secondly, some parts of the UK and the wider EPPO region have a climate that based on the evidence available, would be highly suitable for the pest. Therefore, the nematode is likely to be able to establish within the UK and the EPPO region should it enter the territory. The pest is causing damage within a climate very similar to the PRA area and there are no clear abiotic or climatic barriers to its establishment, spread or damage potential within the UK or the wider EPPO region. The cryptic nature of the first years of infection and the nematode's presence within the buds of dormant trees means once detected the pest is likely to have spread within a wide region of the initial finding.

In the UK, *Fagus* is used less for timber and more for specialist use such as for flooring, veneer and furniture, and economic impacts were rated as moderate. Environmental impacts are a key concern however. Tree mortality, as reported in the US, is likely to be seen if *L. crenatae* were to establish in the UK and *Fagus* is a keystone species playing an important part in ecosystems. Social impacts are also rated highly as beech is the fifth most important broadleaf tree in the UK and is found in parks and gardens throughout the UK. Because of the very visible and distinctive symptoms the disease presents, public awareness and concern is likely to be high, and the outbreak in the US has already been reported in major news outlets in the UK.

## Summary of responses

UK Plant Health Services received 2 responses to the Pest Risk Analysis, one from the HTA and one from the Wales Plant Health Evidence and Advisory Group.

Both respondents were supportive of the conclusions of the PRA.

The HTA had some additional comments on future approaches, and these are discussed in more detail in the next section.

## Key concerns and government response

The HTA recommended that mandatory testing for the nematode on all *Fagus* bonsai imports be considered.

*Response:* UK Plant Health Services thank the HTA for their views on this. Development of a test is at an early stage and is not currently suitable for routine use. Management options will be considered by EPPO in their review of the PRA, and Defra will be looking in detail at which options are most appropriate for the UK.

The HTA urged Defra to seek answers for some of the fundamental questions the PRA raised, specifically mentioning concerns about the uncertainties regarding beech seed, and asked for clarity on the timelines for conducting the research proposed.

*Response:* UK Plant Health Services thank the HTA for their recognition of the importance of research on this pest. This pest is indeed being flagged as a priority for research. Knowledge on this pest is very much a developing area and as new information becomes available that reduces some of the uncertainties, amendments to the PRA will be published. However, with the pest only present in North America and Japan it is not possible for the UK to control timelines on some areas of research.

The HTA sought clarity on how Defra plant health teams would be linked into information from the EU's policy and scientific plant health committees as part of SPS negotiations, and requested that trade be informed on updates on the EU position on *L. crenatae* as soon as possible.

*Response:* Negotiations are ongoing, but the common understanding published in May 2025 notes that the UK should have appropriate access to relevant agencies, systems and databases in the areas covered by the SPS Agreement. Stakeholders will be kept informed of developments on this pest, in the EU and elsewhere, via usual routes.

The HTA requested clarity on the actions that would be required if *L. crenatae* was introduced to the EU, recognising that trade from the EU is very important.

*Response:* We also recognise the importance of trade from the EU. Both EU and GB legislation prohibit plants for planting of *Fagus* from any country other than the EU, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, with the exception of seeds, in vitro material and naturally or artificially dwarfed woody plants for planting. There is, therefore, no greater risk of introduction into the EU than into GB. However, we recognise that should the pest be introduced into this region our current trade would make introduction to the UK more likely, and consideration will be given to mitigations which could be taken in that event. The EU Commission are linked in with EPPO reports and will be looking to act on their recommendations.

A request was made both for a communications campaign and an outbreak contingency plan.

*Response:* We would like to reassure stakeholders that both awareness raising and contingency planning are priorities for this pest. Assistance with awareness raising from the HTA would be much appreciated, once communication documents are ready for publication.

The HTA also kindly provided some figures on seedlings grown under cover, and offered help with further information on the scope and impact of policy decisions for *L. crenatae* and the UK sector's trade in beech.

*Response:* UK Plant Health Services, are, as ever, very grateful for additional information, and will amend the PRA appropriately with the figures provided.

## Next steps

The responses received were supportive of the conclusions of the UK PHRG, and on this basis the UK propose only minor edits with additional information mentioned above to the PRA, which will contribute to decisions on the future policy position for this pest.

I would like to thank those responding for taking the time to submit views on the stakeholder engagement. Your comments have been very valuable in helping to develop a policy position on this pest. I hope this letter demonstrates the reasoning behind our decision and that we have sought to find a solution which reflects the current position and the views expressed from different stakeholders. We will be pleased to continue engaging with you about this pest.

If you have any views about how this review was handled, or its outcome, please let me know.

Yours faithfully,

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Recipients: Organisations listed below (excludes responses from private individuals)

**Wales Plant health Evidence and Advisory Group**  
**HTA**