

Proposed badger cull

On 15th September 2010, Agriculture Minister Jim Paice published proposals for additional measures to help control Bovine Tuberculosis [Bovine TB] in cattle for public consultation. Defra is consulting until 8th December 2010, on a proposal to issue licences to farmers and landowners who wish to cull and/or vaccinate badgers at their own expense.

Badger culling

The government argues that badger culling has the potential to reduce bovine TB in cattle by rapidly reducing the overall number of infected badgers, thus reducing the rate of transmission of the disease

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to cattle. The main body of evidence on the impact of badger culling is the Government-funded Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT), which took place between 1998 and 2007. The trial demonstrates that badger culling reduces the incidence of bovine TB in cattle in high incidence areas if it is carried out on a sufficient scale, in

a widespread, coordinated and efficient way and over a sustained period of time. However, the RBCT showed that incidence of TB in cattle on land immediately surrounding the culling area increased initially. Over the course of the trial, this negative effect tailed off. Latest RBCT analysis shows that the level of TB in cattle in the surrounding area is comparable with the un-culled survey-only areas. Fortunately, measures can be put in place to mitigate the negative effects seen in the surrounding area. These include setting a required minimum area over which culling must take place and making use of barriers such as coastlines and major rivers, to limit badger movement.

The Minister thinks that badger culling is necessary because no other country in the world with a similar reservoir of bovine TB in wildlife has eradicated TB from cattle without stringent wildlife control measures. Mr Paice states that he has looked carefully at continuing to use the badger vaccination in isolation, but believes that it is not effective enough to stop the spread of TB and that veterinary advice and scientific evidence indicate that a combination of a vaccination and culling would be maximally effective.

The consultation makes the following proposals:

- Where there is a high incidence of Bovine TB in cattle, farmers and landowners will be eligible to

apply for issued licences under the *Protection of Badgers Act* 1992 cull badgers at their own expense.

- Licences would be subject to strict criteria to ensure culling is carried out effectively, humanely and with high regard to animal welfare:
 - Only culling by cage-trapping and shooting free-running badgers, carried out by trained, competent operators with appropriate firearms licences would be permitted. Gassing and snaring will not be allowed.
 - Culling would take place over a minimum area of 150km² so that it will have a net beneficial effect. Thus the government would expect to receive licence applications from groups of farmers and landowners rather than individuals.
 - License applicants will have to show how they intend to minimise the negative effect in the surrounding area identified by the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT).
- Most existing cattle measures will remain firmly in place. In some cases controls will be tightened where there is a higher disease risk; in others burdens on farmers will be reduced, but only where the Government is confident that this will not increase disease risk.



- Pre-movement testing will remain in place following a review. Some minor changes to TB testing will take effect immediately.

Mr Paice intends to publish a comprehensive bovine TB eradication programme early in 2011.

The proposed cull is however hugely controversial and opposed by many animal protection societies.

‘Viva!’ (Vegetarians International Voice for Animals) states that *‘...cattle-to-cattle transmission is the main vector of bovine TB, and that badgers play no major role in the spread of the disease. This view is backed by the results of the 10-year study by the Independent Scientific Group’s (ISG) report into the matter, which concluded that “Badger culling cannot meaningfully contribute to the control of bTB in Britain.” The ISG report also concludes that surviving badgers may move to new areas and this could cause the disease to spread.’*

The group points to the fact that recent figures have shown that TB infections in cattle in Britain are actually falling, not rising and maintains that this is evidence that a ‘cull’ of badgers is not needed and will be counterproductive. The group has also expressed fears that there will be no way of judging the contribution of increased cattle controls vs. badger ‘culling’ in the role of disease management. Viva! believes that killing badgers will be heralded as working, when it will actually be cattle controls that reduce the disease.

In England, if farmers are issued licences to shoot badgers Viva! Is

concerned that badgers will either be caught in cage traps and shot or shot as free-running animals and as badgers are nocturnal animals this will take place at night and could result in many animals seriously injured and not killed outright. Viva! has also criticised the piecemeal approach in England, where one farmer may shoot badgers and his neighbour will not. This goes directly against the advice of the ISG report. The plans also reveal that dead badgers will not be tested for TB, which means that the level of disease will not be reported.

Viva! maintains that the blame for the bovine TB crisis lays with governments and poor rural management by farmers. Dairy cows produce much more milk now and are in bigger herds than ever before – both of these factors are detrimental to an animal’s ability to fight infection. Also, the number of cows killed because of bovine TB is dwarfed by the number killed because of other issues: approximately 90,000 dairy cows culled annually due to mastitis (infection of the udder), 31,000 due to lameness and 125,000 due to infertility.

Dangerous Dogs Consultation Published

On 25th November, the Animal Welfare Minister Lord Henley published the summary of the responses to the dangerous dogs consultation to better inform wider

public debate on the issue, and repeated his commitment to tackling dangerous dogs and irresponsible owners. The Government is also currently working on a proposal for a project to look at the motivations, barriers and social norms surrounding the acquisition and keeping of ‘status dogs’ in urban communities in the UK. This project has the support of the Home Office, Communities, Met Police, RSPCA and Dogs Trust. Lord Henley believes that the owners of dangerous dogs must be held account. He is working closely with Ministerial colleagues in the Home Office on the anti-social behaviour dimension to this issue. Responses to many of the forty proposals in the dangerous dogs consultation were strongly divided, with primary concerns being whether the bans on specific dog breeds were the best approach to reduce dog attacks, and how to deal promptly and effectively with those that allow their dogs to be a nuisance to others. Lord Henley is in dialogue with groups such as the RSPCA to look at other issues raised in the consultation, such as breed-specific bans, micro-chipping and attacks on private property. The Government is expected to announce its approach to dangerous dogs early in the New Year.