

Bovine TB: Consultation on revised guidance for licensing badger control areas

Response from

Q's 1 – 4 name, email address etc

Q.5. We would be grateful for your views on removing the restriction on the maximum number of new badger control areas to be licensed each year.

Our group firmly opposes the removal of restrictions on the maximum number of new badger cull areas licenced each year.

Our group was formed in response to the Government's policy on including badger culling as part of their overall bTB strategy. As an organisation, it serves as a hub for many people who oppose badger culling and some individual members have had experience of five years of badger culling in the original cull zones with subsequent years of culling elsewhere. It appears that the country now faces many more areas that will kill badgers in 2018 and subsequent years.

Farmer-led culling – an untried and untested method of culling badgers – was introduced into Somerset and Gloucestershire to see if it was humane, effective and safe. The Government's own Independent Expert Panel ruled that it was neither humane or effective (at removing at least 70% of the estimated number of badgers). Since then nothing has changed except the British Veterinary Association has withdrawn its support for free shooting. The Government has ignored the findings of both the IEP and the BVA which shows that it has no interest in animal welfare.

In addition, there is no evidence that the badger culls are working to reduce the increase in bTB and removing any comparison areas (i.e. where no culling is taking place) will further weaken a hasty and ill-advised policy to the point where no-one will know what effect on bTB it is having. The only firm evidence will be the death of hundreds of thousands of healthy badgers and the virtual removal of a key native species from our ecosystem.

We are – and will be - directly affected by the deaths of thousands of badgers in our local neighbourhoods and on our favourite walks across the county including badgers killed on nature reserves by the deliberate targeting of farmers on neighbouring land. We know better than many MPs and the vested interests involved – cattle vets included – of the heartbreak and devastation that this ill-advised, cruel and amoral policy creates on so many levels.

The Government isn't transparent or clear on many details pertaining to the badger culls and there is no evidence that any of these culls have worked. In fact, there is evidence to show a slight increase in number of new cases of TB in West Somerset whilst West Glos remains at a level similar to that pre-culling. Added to this, we have

no idea how many badgers were culled during supplementary culling in West Somerset or West Glos during 2017-18 since the Government has refused to release the data. Instead, it is stated that these figures will be issued 'in due course'

With nothing to contradict this evidence, we know that the removal of the restrictions on the maximum number of new badger control areas licenced each year will not address the threat posed to cattle by cattle which is, overwhelmingly, the main source of repeated and increased breakdowns.

It will, without doubt, be an unprecedented attack on a native species in modern times. An area double the size of Cheshire was culled last year and now it appears that an increase may take place in all the counties in the HRAs plus the LRAs. Theoretically, badgers could be culled across the whole of England. This is shocking, overwhelming and appalling.

The evidence shows that badger persecution and wildlife crime is rising across the country as badgers continue to be demonised by the farming industry. Increasing and exacerbating this to the whole country at a time when the Conservative Party is, apparently, intending to increase its 'green' credentials to attract the younger voter seems counter-intuitive.

The Government knows the consensus of independent scientists is firmly against badger culling as part of the bovine TB strategy. A removal of these restrictions and increasing the areas of badger culling will be a blow against science and evidence-led policy and will vividly demonstrate that this policy is a direct result of a political party pandering to prejudice amongst its core voters. - wealthy and influential landowners and farmers

To date

- environmental impact assessment surveys on original badger cull areas have not been released despite a court order
- there is no mention of a major environmental impact assessment of the large-scale removal of a key native mammal across the whole country as on-going culls operate for an unknown number of years
- in order to try and reduce the costs of culling in an attempt to maintain the original cost benefit analysis means that monitoring the humaneness, safety and efficacy of the culls has been – and will continue to be - seriously compromised
- no-one knows where cull areas are leading to a lack of trust, suspicion and increasing alarm in counties affected by the badger culls. Neighbours distrust neighbours, suspicion grows, bullying by cull companies increases, arguments grow amongst families.
- the review of the current TB policy may (or may not) include a review of the badger culls. However since the badger cull appears to be the main tool deployed by the Government in the HRAs so far, we fail to see how this cannot be addressed. Since the report is not due until the end of September,

how can further badger cull licences be issued in, potentially, late August 2018 without the results of the Review. This implies a ridiculous waste of public money on a Review that has been set up to, potentially, fail since its findings may have been ignored with the issue of more Licences.

- effective cattle testing in HRAs is still minimal with an estimated 4% of herds tested effectively. Some experts believe an estimated 50% of herds may contain individual cattle with undetected TB, cattle-cattle transmission is still responsible for over 94% of new breakdowns.
- as the Government tries to portray Britain as a world leader in wildlife conservation, killing hundreds of thousands of badgers – a native species – sends a very bad message to the world
- badger vaccination is consistently marginalised by the Government
- exploring alternate strategies such as managing bTB more effectively and learning to 'live' with the disease in a more sustainable way is ignored

To summarise, a frightened party looking after its own interests will not help farmers; it will not help our environment; it will alienate many members of the public and it will kill untold numbers of badgers for no good reason at all.