



The Wildlife Trusts Position Statement
18th November 2010

Badgers and bovine TB

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Bovine TB

- The Wildlife Trusts are fully aware that TB in cattle is a significant problem for farming in the UK and that urgent action is required to combat the disease. We particularly recognise the important role that the livestock industry can play in the environmentally sensitive management of the countryside, and the serious disruption and anxiety caused to farmers experiencing a TB herd breakdown.
- The Wildlife Trusts believe that action to address bTB should be based on clear scientific evidence that can be effectively applied in practice.
- Our position below is based on detailed consideration of the available scientific evidence, work with leading scientists and expert opinion

Bovine TB control in cattle

- The Wildlife Trusts believe that the long-term solution to controlling TB in cattle is through vaccination of cattle and we want the Government to pursue development and (EU) approval for a TB vaccine for cattle as a matter of urgency
- The Wildlife Trusts believe that the solution to controlling cattle to cattle and cattle to badger transmission in the short-term is through effective testing, movement controls, and other bio-security measures (e.g. feed stores and areas where cattle are fed should be badger proofed)
- The Wildlife Trusts believe that cattle-to-cattle transmission is the most significant route of infection for bTB and that action to address this should form the main plank of policy

Badgers and bovine TB:

The Wildlife Trusts accept that bTB is present in some parts of the UK badger population and that, where disease incidence is high, badgers along with other native mammals act as a reservoir for the disease and a source of bTB infection in cattle. We recognise that controlling transmission of the disease from and between badgers has to be part of an effective long-term solution.

The Independent Scientific Group and Sir David King agreed on a number of conditions that **a culling strategy must meet** in order to maximise its chance of having a beneficial effect on incidence of TB cattle herd breakdowns:

- 1) **Culling in areas where there is a high and persistence level of bovine TB** in cattle
- 2) **Four consecutive annual removal operations** appear to be the minimum needed to give overall beneficial results on a local scale

- 3) Culling should be **delivered in a co-ordinated manner and done as completely and efficiently as possible**. An additional suggestion made by the ISG is that culling should be simultaneous across the culling area.
 - 4) Culling should be carried out over a **minimum size area of 150km²**
 - 5) Steps should be taken to help **mitigate the detrimental effects of culling observed in the area surrounding the culled area**
 - 6) Where possible, **geographical boundaries** (motorways, conurbations, coast, substantial rivers) or land without cattle should surround the cull area to minimise the disease risk from perturbation
- **We do not believe that all these conditions can be met effectively AND together. Failure to meet these conditions could make matters worse.**
 - We also believe that any proposals to control bTB should include both a means of measuring success or failure and a clear exit strategy.

Vaccines for badgers

- We believe that vaccination of badgers is the strategy of choice to control and eventually eliminate TB in badgers.
- A number of Trusts are now trialling the currently available (injectable) badger vaccine.
- We will seek assurances that vaccinated badgers will not be killed in any culling programme so that our efforts are not wasted and the number of immune badgers are increased.
- We want the Government to fund the development of an oral TB vaccine for badgers as a matter of urgency and we want to discuss how we can help to trial and deploy such a vaccine.

Conclusions

- The Wildlife Trusts do not support a cull of badgers, as we do not believe this will deliver a significant and sustained reduction in cattle TB.
- There is a very real risk of exacerbating the spread and incidence of the disease in the badger population due to the 'perturbation effect'.
- We believe there are alternatives to culling badgers, such as vaccination, that will deliver more effective, suitable, and sustainable reductions in cattle TB.
- The Wildlife Trusts will continue to review our position on control of badgers to reduce the incidence of bTB in the light of any new scientific evidence.