

# AGENDA

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**QUESTION MARK**  
Culling badgers could make cattle TB worse.

## 'Culling badgers will make TB worse'

**I HAVE spent the major part of my 42 year career as a wildlife ecologist studying bovine TB in badgers.**

**BY DR CHRIS CHEESEMAN**  
Retired head of wildlife diseases Central Science Laboratory

I have taken a close interest in the recent announcement by the Assembly Government to implement measures in West Wales designed — they say — to eradicate the disease.

The decision to include badger culling as part of this exercise is perverse.

I have no political agenda or vested interest. I am just a retired scientist who is anxious that people have the necessary facts to form their own opinion.

There is no doubt that badgers are a reservoir of bovine TB, and that they may transmit the disease to cattle. Equally, cattle provide a reservoir of infection and transmit the disease both within and between herds and — importantly — to badgers.

As far as we know, the disease is not a threat to badger populations. Transmission of TB bacteria from badgers to cattle, and vice versa, may take place in and around farm buildings, or in fields, by contaminated ex-

cretions. Bacteria can survive in the environment for days or weeks, depending on the conditions.

Cattle are regularly tested to identify TB-diseased animals, which are removed from the herd by slaughter. Unfortunately, the test fails to identify a significant number of infected cattle which remain in the herd, prolonging the infection with risks of spread to other cattle and other farms through cattle movement.

When the involvement of badgers was first recognised in the 1970s, the Government culled badgers as a hopeful solution. It didn't work.

The trend over the last few decades has been an inexorable rise in cattle TB incidence. This rise is partly due to deficiencies in cattle testing and the undisclosed reservoir of infection in cattle and partly to infection from badgers.

Several modifications to the badger culling regime were made to try to make

badger culling work, but to no avail.

Scientific evidence was lacking, and the controversy over whether to cull badgers was finally addressed in 1998 by the introduction of a scientific trial in England, where two strategies were evaluated.

So-called "reactive" culling strategy, where badgers were removed on and around farms where TB outbreaks had occurred in cattle, made cattle TB incidence RISE by 25 per cent because of a perturbation effect. This is where disease spread is actually exacerbated by culling. The strategy was immediately abandoned.

### Effects

"Proactive" culling, where large areas were trapped once a year for five years, produced unexpected results. In the core of the area, cattle TB was reduced by around 25 per cent, while on the edge it ROSE by about the same amount, again due to perturbation.

Both the positive and negative effects have diminished since culling stopped. The latest analysis of these results led scientists to conclude "badger culling is

unlikely to contribute effectively to the control of cattle TB in Britain".

So what has led the Assembly Government to include badger culling in their pilot study?

To put in place improved cattle control measures is sensible and necessary, but the scientific evidence shows that badger culling could make things worse.

The expressed view that the Welsh approach will provide valuable scientific evidence for future policy development is false; it will do nothing of the sort.

Any effects of the badger culling or cattle measures will be impossible to tease apart. It is like taking two medications for the same illness. One might make you better and the other might make you worse, but you have to keep taking both because you don't know which is beneficial.

How will the Assembly Government take the results of their pilot study forward in future, assuming it goes ahead and there is some small net benefit?

The Assembly Government hopes for a minimum nine per cent improvement in cattle TB, but only after five years of culling and with

a recognition that the disease incidence could be worsened in the interim.

The financial costs of culling will certainly exceed any savings achieved by an appreciable margin.

Culling will NOT eradicate TB in badgers in the pilot area; it will actually increase the prevalence of TB in the residual badger population. The Assembly Government says it "will take preventative action to stop badgers in the area from becoming re-infected". This statement is at best naïve and at worst deliberately misleading.

### Worried

The sensible and sustainable way forward is through vaccines, improved cattle TB testing, and better cattle husbandry and biosecurity.

I question the sense of a disease control initiative that can be guaranteed to geographically spread the disease; if I was a farmer on the edge of the proposed culling area, I would be seriously worried about the increased risk of cattle TB outbreaks that will result.

How anyone can contemplate doing something that might make the situation worse is beyond me.

## We Say...

### Positive signs from the docks

**THE fact that Swansea Docks is being used for its intended purpose once more is great news.**

In these days of scarcity of employment and a struggling housing market, it seems right that the news coming from SA1 of late is about the creation of new jobs, rather than more new homes.

No doubt both will be needed in the long run. But it must not be jobs at any cost, and there will need to be careful management of the new ship breakers facility planned for the docks.

No-one wants to see Swansea Bay littered with rusting hulks waiting their turn to be chopped up.

If those rusting hulks are also contaminated, the prospect becomes even uglier.

Equally, the knee-jerk reaction that often accompanies the idea of anything contaminated coming our way must not stop a legitimate company going about its legitimate business.

**We should celebrate new employment, and at the same time insist upon the highest standards, both from the company itself, and those employed to monitor it.**

● For our report — see page 5

### Catch the cheats

**FOR the thousands of workers who save to pay their increasing household bills it is important that benefit fraudsters are caught and punished.**

Those who are entitled to receive help towards their housing and council tax costs also expect a lot of effort to go into finding those who abuse the system.

If there is one thing guaranteed to make the hackles of conscientious bill payers rise, it is the thought that someone, somewhere, is receiving money to which they are not entitled.

This is true whether they are homeowners in work who pay their way, or those whose difficult circumstances mean that they qualify for benefits in one form or another.

**It is essential that the possibility of cheating the system becomes negligible while ensuring protection for those people in genuine difficulties.**

● For our report — see page 14

### Fashioning success

**SWANSEA'S where it's at thanks to last night's Evening Post's Fashion Addict event.**

The night was glamorous and fun, but on a serious note it reinforced our role as a regional centre and a fantastic option for shoppers from all over South West Wales.

Ticket demand outstripped supply to such an extent that they were like gold dust.

**An excellent example of just what this great city is made of!**

● For our report — see page 3



**Emma Denholm**

## Champagne, spilled ink and spag bol — it's all in 'diary' of former leader

FORMER leader Tony Blair is set to reveal all about his time in power when his memoirs are published this September.

However, like most self-penned tomes, it's unlikely to tell us all the gritty details we really want to know so it got me thinking how a secret Adrian Mole-type diary might read if Blair had one.

Perhaps it would be something like this:  
Diary of Tony Blair, aged 56-and-a-half.  
November 11, 1997: Invited some pop stars round to No 10. Hopefully it will show I'm down with the kids and not a fuddy duddy like the rest of the men in suits. That chap from Oasis seems

pleasant enough but the Bollinger appeared to make him belch a lot and he kept saying "better in than out". A couple of our ornaments have gone also gone missing. Maybe Cherie has moved them, she's a demon with the duster.

April 1, 2000: Cherie keeps talking about this new mate of hers called Carole. She seems nice enough but she's got Cherie chanting and hopping on one leg. Something about channelling positive energies.

August 4, 2005: Met with George Bush for talks today. I think he may have called me Terry a couple of times but after all he is a very busy man with a lot on his mind. Uses an abacus

when discussing the economy, he's so forward thinking.

December 12, 2005: Gordon was being really difficult today. He ate all the chocolate hobnobs at the cabinet meeting, he knows they are my favourite. Then he "accidentally" flicked ink on my tie while I was giving a key speech.

January 28, 2010: Have to go and speak at something called the Chilcot Inquiry tomorrow. Feel as nervous as I did before my GCSE algebra exam when Thickie Morgan hid my textbook. Still, I should be home in time for tea. Cherie's making spag bol, I really don't deserve that woman.



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