



Badger culling is meaningless, report scientists

STRICTLY EMBARGOED: 00.01am Monday 18 June 2007

Badger culling can make no meaningful contribution to cattle TB control in Britain, the Government's Independent Scientific Group (ISG) on bovine tuberculosis (TB) said today, in its final report [1] which has been welcomed by the Badger Trust. Instead, the scientists advise that: [TB] can be reversed, and geographical spread contained, by the rigid application of cattle-based control measures alone.

The report is the culmination of ten years of scientific research, costing 50 million. Almost 11,000 badgers were killed in the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT), also known as the Krebs trial after Professor Sir John Krebs who proposed it.

The team of scientists, from Britain's top universities, concludes that although badgers contribute to cattle TB, [culling] policies under consideration are likely to make matters worse rather than better. The scientists point out that only 14 new cases of TB were prevented in herds, despite five years of coordinated and sustained badger culling across 1,000km² [1, p21] that removed approximately 73 per cent of the badgers [1, p69]. The small beneficial effect on the incidence of TB results in a cost-benefit analysis which shows that it seems unlikely [that culling] would be worthwhile under any economic conditions [1, p159].

Instead, the ISG advises that substantial reductions in TB can be achieved by improving cattle-based control measures: Such measures include the introduction of more thorough controls on cattle movement through zoning or herd attestation, strategic use of the IFN [gamma interferon blood] test in both routine and pre-movement testing, quarantine of purchased cattle, shorter testing intervals, careful attention to breakdowns in areas that are currently low risk, and whole herd slaughter for chronically affected herds [1, p21 and Chapters 7 and 10].

Trevor Lawson, spokesperson for the Badger Trust, said: Killing badgers is like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, doing far more harm than good. A less brutish approach to the small role played by badgers, such as electric fencing around farm buildings, might well yield greater benefits at a fraction of the cost.

Controlling TB in cattle will reduce TB in badgers, further reducing the risk to cattle [1, p21]. These are constructive, win-win solutions that are good for farming, for wildlife and for tax payers. The challenge now is for farmers and vets to see the sense of implementing them.

The Government now has the sound science that it promised to base its TB policy on. The ISGs research has been rubber-stamped by the worlds leading scientists in the worlds leading peer-reviewed journals.

The challenge for David Miliband is to implement effective TB controls on cattle without plunging farmers into bankruptcy. Constructive support measures for farmers will be essential, because there are thousands of undiagnosed, infected cattle out there. Removing them will mean medium-term pain for the Treasury and significant difficulties for a minority of farmers. But the science is crystal clear: that is the only way forwards.

Notes to editors:

For further comment, contact Trevor Lawson on 07976 262388.

1. Bourne, J. et al (2007), Bovine TB: The Scientific Evidence - A Science Base for a Sustainable Policy to Control TB in Cattle; An Epidemiological Investigation into Bovine Tuberculosis, Final Report of the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB Defra, London. The report will be available online on Monday 18 June at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb/isg/index.htm>