



Ireland's bloody shame

Monday 14 May 2007

A major report, published today by Badgerwatch Ireland and the UK's Badger Trust, calls on consumers to boycott Irish dairy and beef products and to boycott Ireland as a holiday destination.

The fully-referenced report reveals that the virtual extermination of badgers in the Republic of Ireland, with up to 6,000 snares set every night, has failed to control bovine TB. Instead, levels are twice as high as in Great Britain, where badgers are not being culled.

The report reveals that:

1. In 2006, 0.4% of the Republic of Ireland's cattle were slaughtered with bovine TB, compared to 0.2% in Great Britain;
2. Yet in many areas, Ireland's badgers are locally extinct: up to 6,000 badger snares are set by Government employees every night of the year;
3. At best, the density of badgers in Ireland is only 10% of that in equivalent habitats in south west England;
4. Yet in 2006, Ireland slaughtered 9% more cattle with bovine TB than Great Britain, even though the Irish national herd is only 56% the size of Britain's;
5. Bovine TB in Ireland is largely spread by cattle. Bovine TB rocketed in Ireland when pre-movement TB testing for cattle was abandoned in 1996. It quickly reached the highest level ever recorded in 1999, with more than 45,000 reactors. Yet badger culling continued throughout that period;
6. Pre-movement TB testing for cattle has been recommended by both Veterinary Ireland and the EU, but the advice has been ignored by Irish agriculture ministers;

7. Genetic evidence shows that there is no significant association between strains of TB found in Irish cattle and the strains of TB found in badgers within 2km or even 5km of those cattle;
8. Much of the bovine TB research in Ireland has never been published in peer reviewed journals and cannot be taken seriously;
9. The results of two badger culling projects have been published in peer reviewed journals, but have serious scientific weaknesses in their methodology. In particular, both studies lack a valid scientific control;
10. Brucellosis, a less infectious disease than TB, is spread by the "uncontrolled movements" of cattle between different land parcels of Ireland's fragmented farms. Consequently, there is ample opportunity for the spread of bovine TB amongst cattle and this, in turn, explains the clustered nature of TB in Irish herds;
11. A very large proportion of new TB herd breakdowns in Ireland are detected at slaughter. This confirms that, despite Ireland having a policy of annual TB testing, the testing regime is missing huge numbers of infected cattle;
12. EU inspections have criticised Ireland for inadequate cattle movement monitoring and a wide variety of other failings which allow the spread of bovine TB between cattle.

Bernie Barratt, from Badgerwatch Ireland, commented: "I am currently looking after two badger cubs whose mother has almost certainly been snared or shot. Many other cubs have starved to death because the Government insists on killing badgers when mothers have cubs below ground. The extermination of badgers in Ireland is now so extensive, that I have no idea whether it will ever be safe to release these cubs into the wild.

"I am very proud of Ireland's many achievements, but this senseless slaughter is a horrible stain on my country's character. We have no choice but to bring this to the attention of international consumers, since our politicians lack the moral courage to protect our native wildlife."

Trevor Lawson, report author and Badger Trust public affairs advisor, commented: "The official persecution of badgers in the Republic of Ireland is an international disgrace and must surely breach the Berne Convention, which protects badgers in Europe.

"The grotesque extent of this extermination proves that killing badgers does not control or eradicate bovine TB in cattle. Badgers are a scapegoat for bad farming practices and an inadequate bovine TB testing regime. Our findings make a mockery of the demands for badger culling made in Britain by the National Farmers Union and other organisations."

Ends

Notes to editors:

Ireland: Bernie Barrett, with the two rescued badger cubs, is available for pre-recorded interview in Waterford from 11-13 May. She is available for live interview on 14 May,

when the report is officially released. She can be contacted for interview on 00 353 (0)51 373 876 and on 00 353 (0)8793 9394096.

UK: Trevor Lawson will be available for pre-recorded interview from 11-13 May, with two examples of the 6,000 snares laid for badgers in Ireland every night. He will be available for live or pre-recorded interview at Millbank, London on 14 May. He can be contacted for interview on 00 44 (0)7976 262388.