



## BADGER CULL "OFF THE AGENDA" say Conservationists

Press Release

**STRICTLY EMBARGOED 00.01 Wednesday 27 February 2008**

The Badger Trust has welcomed a report by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee which concludes that the current regime of TB testing for cattle 'is not working effectively'[1].

Calling for a 'multi-faceted approach', the Committee recommends:

- more frequent cattle testing, with more frequent and targeted combined use of the tuberculin skin test and the gamma interferon test;
- the evaluation of post-movement cattle testing;
- greater communication with farmers on the benefits of biosecurity measures;
- the deployment of badger and cattle vaccines when they become available in the future;
- and continued work on the epidemiology of the disease.

Although the Committee says that 'under certain well-defined circumstances it is possible that [badger] culling could make a contribution towards the reduction in incidence of cattle TB in hot spot areas', the Badger Trust says that the demanding conditions that would have to be met would mean that culling is effectively off the agenda.

Trevor Lawson for the Badger Trust commented: "The current TB testing regime is full of loopholes and weaknesses, with the result that cattle are spreading bovine TB throughout the national herd every day. For example, the skin test that is used for most cattle testing is missing around one third of the infected animals, leaving the disease to fester in herds and spread to others. We are delighted that the Select Committee has called on the Government to tighten up that testing regime.

"In Northern Ireland, a tighter focus on cattle testing has virtually halved the incidence of the disease in just three years[2]. The same is achievable here, provided the Government acts quickly and invests properly.

"There can now be simply no valid chance of a badger cull being implemented. The dwindling number of livestock farmers do not control enough land and lack the financial resources, time and coordination required to implement a cull over large areas for long periods of time. Badger culling must now be off the agenda.

"Moreover, the massive badger extermination policy in the Republic of Ireland, initiated in 2002, has failed to control the disease. In 2007, the number of TB reactors was virtually the same as in 2002[3], despite five years of snaring and shooting across 30 per cent of Ireland's land area where cattle are most concentrated. The proof is

there: culling is a waste of time."

ENDS

Trevor Lawson is available for interview in Millbank, London from 07.00 on Wednesday 27 February. He is also available for pre-records from 16.30 on Tuesday 26 February. Call 07976 262388 to arrange an interview.

1. Badger and cattle TB: the final report of the Independent Scientific Group. The accompanying press release states: 'The Government's current method of controlling cattle TB, that of surveillance, testing and slaughter, is not working effectively. That

is the conclusion of the EFRA select committee in its report Badgers and cattle TB: the final report of the Independent Scientific Group on cattle TB published at 00.01 am on Wednesday 27 February.'

2. Data from Northern Ireland show that the annual herd incidence of bovine TB has fallen from 9.56 per cent in 2003 to 5.23 in 2007.

There is no badger culling in Northern Ireland. Instead, the process of controlling bovine TB has been rebuilt around a robust database which focuses on individual cattle movements and maps herd breakdowns in detail so that 'associated' herds can also be traced and tested.

3. In 2002, there were 28,930 TB reactors in the Republic of Ireland. In 2007, there were 27,703 reactors. Yet there are 7,000 fewer herds and, in 2007 alone, the number of cattle fell by 200,000. (Source: Department for Agriculture 18 February 2008).

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