

"I have NOT decided to cull badgers," Elin Jones admits in Wales

For immediate release: 16 June 2008

Lawyers acting for Elin Jones, Minister for Rural Affairs in the Welsh Assembly Government, have confirmed that she has NOT made a decision to cull badgers in Wales.

The admission comes in response to a letter before action, sent to the Minister by lawyers acting for the Badger Trust. This was the initial stage of the Badger Trust launching a Judicial Review of what was perceived by the public and the world's media as a decision to cull badgers made on 8 April, when Elin Jones told the Assembly: "We believe that the most effective measure to address both sources of infection and cross-infection, subject to strict regulation and meeting a number of requirements, would be a targeted cull of badgers in TB high incidence areas. To take this forward we will prioritise the establishment of an intensive action pilot in an area which has been identified as a TB hotspot."

Assembly members, the wider public and the media quite reasonably regarded this as a decision. The media consistently reported: "Badgers are to be culled in Wales" (BBC); "Badgers are to be slaughtered in Wales" (Western Mail); "Badgers must die" (The Times); "Badgers will be killed" (Press Association); and "Target badger cull go-ahead" (Farmer's Guardian). The story was reported around the world. But in response to the letter before action, officials in the Assembly's Legal Services division have stated:

"In substance, the Ministerial statement on which the potential [Judicial Review] would be based reflects the beginning of a process as to how, if at all, particular aspects of the Welsh Assembly Government's TB Eradication Programme could be implemented. It does not authorise the culling of badgers. It does not identify any area in which the culling of badgers would be appropriate. In particular, the Ministerial statement does not involve or constitute the grant of a licence to kill any badgers under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 or any other legislation."

Trevor Lawson, for Badger Trust, commented:

"Elin Jones gave every impression that a decision had been made and that badger culling was a 'most effective' measure. Yet a decision to cull was contrary to the scientific advice that she had received, which said that killing badgers can make no meaningful contribution to bovine TB control [1].

"This letter from Elin Jones' lawyers confirms that the Welsh Assembly Government is still some way behind Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for the Environment, in assessing the bovine TB problem. Over the next few months Mrs Jones and her staff will learn that badger culling is not practical or cost effective and is, besides, ineffective. We are confident that a badger cull will not take place in Wales. We regret that Elin Jones has not formally invited Badger Trust Cymru to meet her, so that she could explain the detail of her policy.

"Bovine TB is spread by cattle to other cattle and to wildlife. To say otherwise simply spreads confusion and doubt amongst farmers who deserve better leadership from their politicians. We hope that Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for the Environment, will not take the same ill-thought, short-term approach that has been adopted by Elin Jones.

"Mr Benn now has a clear opportunity to accept the scientific advice that he has received and reject badger culling as meaningless in the battle against bovine TB."

ENDS

For further comment, contact Trevor Lawson on 07976 262388. Steve Clark from Badger Trust Cymru can be available for TV or radio interview in Cardiff if required: 07867 673054.

The Badger Trust represents dozens of badger conservation groups across the UK, including eight in Wales which collectively form Badger Trust Cymru.

1. Minutes (20 February 2008), Meeting between [sic] Minister for Rural Affairs and Professor John Bourne, Department for Rural Affairs, Cardiff.

Badger Trust is the only charity solely dedicated to the conservation of badgers across Great Britain.

PO Box 708, EAST GRINSTEAD, RH19 2WN

Tel: 08458 287878 Fax: 02380 233896

E-mail press@badgertrust.org.uk

www.badgertrust.org.uk

Registered charity no.1111440

Company registered in the UK No.5460677