



To:  
George Eustice MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for  
Farming, Food and Marine Environment  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural  
Affairs,  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR

To:  
Wildlife Licensing Unit  
Natural England  
First Floor  
Temple Quay House  
2 The Square  
Bristol BS1 6EB

21/10/2013

Dear Sirs,

### **Pilot badger culls – revised population estimates**

According to recent statements made by Secretary of State for Environment Owen Paterson, during the 6 weeks of licensed shooting in the pilot badger culls 850 and 708 badgers were shot in the Somerset and Gloucestershire zones respectively. These figures represent 35.4% and 21% of the median population estimates in use at the start of the trial, which were themselves derived from data presented in a report to Natural England in February 2013<sup>i</sup>.

Towards the end of the six week periods, the Secretary of State announced that the population estimates had been revised downwards, to 1450 in the Somerset zone and 2450 in the Gloucestershire zone<sup>ii</sup>. Taking 2400 and 3400 respectively as the median figures for the original population estimates from the February 2013 report, these new estimates represent reductions of 39.6% in the Somerset zone, and 28% in the Gloucestershire zone.

Even using the new reduced population estimates, the proportions shot (at 58.6% and 29% for Somerset and Gloucestershire respectively) still fell well short of the target proportions specified in the licenses.

Can you please provide answers to the following questions as a matter of urgency:

- On what basis and over what time period were the new population estimates made, and what confidence limits apply to these estimates?
- On what date were the new estimates supplied to Natural England?
- If the new estimates were available to Natural England before the pilot culls began, why were the kill targets not adjusted accordingly before shooting began? Were the kill targets adjusted whilst the culls were taking place?
- If the population estimates from February 2013, and the new estimates, are both considered to be accurate for the time at which they were made, how do you explain the very large reduction in the badger populations in the pilot zones over the interim period? Is any research being undertaken or planned in order to investigate these changes?
- Have similar large population reductions been seen in other populations, for example the

heavily monitored population at Woodchester Park?

- Can DEFRA confirm whether it is aware of rises in reports of illegal killing of badgers in both pilot zones in the last 12 months?
- If illegal killing in and around the pilot zones is considered to be a significant factor in the apparent reductions in badger populations, how can extensions to the licenses be approved in the knowledge that this will likely be accompanied by further illegal activity?
- If the reductions in the populations in the pilot zones are reflective of wider reductions of badger populations across the country, how will this be accounted for when the results of the national badger population survey, announced by DEFRA as long ago as December 2011, are published?
- The fact that the two culls began with kill targets that may well have been higher than the total number of badgers within the two pilot zones must surely be of grave concern for government and Natural England, the licensing authority. Given this finding, what procedures are being put in place to ensure that there can be no localised extinction of badgers within pilot zones?

Please consider these questions as a Freedom of Information request.

Sincerely,



**Mark Jones BVSc MSc (Stir) MSc (UL) MRCVS**  
Executive Director, Humane Society International/UK  
5 Underwood Street, London N1 7LY  
[mjones@hsi.org](mailto:mjones@hsi.org)

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animal-diseases/files/population-badger-pilot-areas.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/badger-cull-extension-application-in-somerset>