

May 2013

Sir,

**British Veterinary Association support for the Government's policy on Bovine TB and badger control in England**

The BVA's position of support for the forthcoming pilot culls of badgers in the west of England is, we believe, not representative of majority scientific or veterinary opinion.

As members of the veterinary profession, we are deeply concerned that the shooting of free-roaming badgers at night with shotguns and rifles is very likely to have detrimental welfare impacts on a large number of individual badgers who may be shot, maimed and severely injured but not killed outright. The natural behaviour of those injured badgers will be to retreat underground where they will likely suffer a slow and very unpleasant death.

DEFRA claims that the 'humaneness' of this killing method will be assessed. However, without a detailed protocol it is impossible to judge whether the pilot culls are likely to generate scientifically robust data which can be used to form an objective opinion on humaneness. Indeed it is our concern that the badger carcasses being assessed will likely be unrepresentative because wounded animals experiencing the greatest and most prolonged distress are highly unlikely to be retrieved for examination, and there will be little or no consideration of the distress caused to surviving badgers whose communities have been disrupted.

In such circumstances, it cannot be right for the BVA to declare support for the badger cull.

Formulation of BVA policy rarely involves the canvassing of its full membership, but rather is achieved through consultation with appropriate specialist divisions. However, policy affecting the welfare of large numbers of badgers who will be subjected to controversial control methods should not be confined to those vets who have a vested interest in the dairy or beef industries affected by bovine tuberculosis. The public and the Government look to the veterinary profession to provide guidance and leadership on issues concerning animal welfare, and the BVA, rightly or wrongly, is regarded by many members of the public and by government as the voice of the veterinary profession. Given the level of public and esteemed scientific concern that has been generated by this issue, it is surely incumbent on the BVA to ensure that its policy reflects the uncertainties surrounding the impacts of culling, particularly in respect to the welfare of affected badgers and their communities.

Until more is known about the protocol for assessing 'humaneness', the BVA should withdraw its support for the Government's policy forthwith, and at the very least canvass its full membership before reconsidering its position.

Sincerely,

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