



### **Badger culling: a discredited and unnecessary policy**

The Independent Expert Panel (IEP) was mandated by DEFRA to assess the effectiveness and humaneness of controlled shooting carried out during the pilot badger culls which took place in Gloucestershire and Somerset in autumn 2013. Its findings were published in April 2014. <sup>[1]</sup>

The IEP report shows that the pilot badger culls were neither effective nor humane.

#### **Failed: Effectiveness**

The Panel concluded that the pilot culls failed to reduce badger populations to the extent identified as necessary in DEFRA's policy, and as required under the culling licenses.

They failed in spite of badger population estimates (and therefore kill target numbers) being drastically reduced just before the pilots began, both pilot culls being controversially extended well beyond their initial 6 week limits, and the culling contractors resorting to trapping and shooting badgers very early in the process when it became evident they were not going to get close to achieving their targets.

#### **Failed: Humaneness**

The panel estimated that up to nearly a quarter of badgers who were shot (or at least shot at) may have taken more than 5 minutes to die, and some individuals suffered for far longer. In all, contractors failed to retrieve around 1 in 5 badgers that were targeted by controlled shooting, so the fate of these badgers remains uncertain.

The IEP stated in its report that ***"we are concerned at the potential for suffering that these figures imply"***. These findings were corroborated by Natural England's monitoring reports, which detailed badgers who were shot multiple times and in non- target body areas.

Shooting badgers has been shown to be neither effective nor humane by DEFRA's own appointed panel, and many experts believe that the pilot culls may have increased the risk of TB transmission for cattle farmers in the pilot zones.

#### **Contractors' breaches of biosecurity**

The IEP report also documented worrying breaches of biosecurity and poor adherence to Natural England's best practice guidelines. Similar breaches were also recorded by NE's own monitors.

#### **Concerns over culling in 2014**

Despite these failings, DEFRA seems determined to continue with the culls in Gloucestershire and Somerset this year, and is even conducting research into badger sett gassing. <sup>[2]</sup>

It remains unclear how or indeed if any future culls, including those due to take place in Gloucestershire and Somerset this summer, will be monitored for effectiveness or humaneness, as recommended by the IEP, but the Minister has confirmed that he has "no plans to ask [the Panel] to report on the second year [of culling]". <sup>[3]</sup>

The British Veterinary Association responded to the IEP report by stating that it would only support the continued use of controlled shooting if the recommendations of the IEP were implemented, and effectiveness and humaneness was demonstrably improved, none of which DEFRA has thus far committed to.

### **Stricter cattle controls & reductions in bTB**

Meanwhile, stricter controls over cattle testing, movement, and on-farm biosecurity protocols are resulting in significant reductions in both new herd incidents of cattle TB and the number of cattle slaughtered.

The most striking improvements have taken place in Wales, where the number of cattle slaughtered because of bTB has almost halved since 2009. Data on new herd incidents in Wales for the 12 months to the end of March this year showed a 22% reduction on the previous 12 months, with the number of cattle slaughtered down by a third over the same period; the number of new herd incidents and cattle slaughtered in Wales during March 2014 was the lowest for a single month in March since 2008 <sup>[4]</sup> .

Wales, which has rejected badger culling, is bringing down cattle TB rates in leaps and bounds. In England, £millions of public funds are being spent on pilot badger culls and research into alternative methods of killing badgers, with all the associated societal divisions and policing costs. Meanwhile England is lagging way behind Wales in terms of controlling bovine TB.

### **Badger cull policy failure**

It's time for DEFRA to accept that badger culling can never be an acceptable, humane, or effective part of any TB control policy, and focus instead on controlling TB using stricter cattle measures, and on the development of vaccines to protect both cattle and badgers from bovine tuberculosis.

The 'open season' for culling under the existing licenses began on 1st June.

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### **References:**

1. Pilot badger culls in Somerset and Gloucestershire: report by the Independent Expert Panel. 3 Apr 2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pilot-badger-culls-in-somerset-and-gloucestershire-report-by-the-independent-expert-panel>
2. DEFRA admits to secret badger sett gassing trials. Farmers Weekly 15 May 2014. <http://www.fwi.co.uk/articles/15/05/2014/144579/defra-admits-to-secret-badger-sett-gassing-trials.htm>
3. George Eustice, 28 April 2014, column 278W. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cmhansrd/cm140428/text/140428w0002.htm#1404297000079>
4. Incidence of tuberculosis (TB) in cattle in Great Britain. 14 May 2014. <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/incidence-tuberculosis-cattle-great-britain/?lang=en>