

Dear Sir,

As scientists with expertise in environmental issues, veterinary medicine, wildlife and livestock health and welfare, we are disappointed by the recent announcement that the government intends to allow the shooting of free roaming badgers in Somerset and Gloucestershire to continue and to roll out its badger culling policy to Dorset.

Bovine tuberculosis continues to represent a serious problem for UK farmers and demands an effective response by the farming industry and government. It is essential that the strategy employed to control the disease is both cost effective and ethical and, above all, supported by the best available evidence.

The efficacy of badger culling was not supported by the ten year, £50 million government funded field trial (the RBCT). The Independent Scientific Group of experts who designed and managed the trial concluded that culling badgers could “*make no meaningful contribution to cattle TB control in Britain*”. In some circumstances culling badgers was shown to make matters worse.

The government appointed Independent Expert Panel (IEP) charged with assessing the humaneness, effectiveness and safety of free shooting in the first year of pilot culls in Gloucestershire and Somerset concluded that the method failed to meet predetermined criteria for effectiveness or humaneness. No improvements to humaneness were reported following the second year of culling, leading to the withdrawal of the British Veterinary Association’s support for the method.

Culling has proved to be extremely expensive, with estimates in excess of £5,000 per badger culled widely reported. The government’s badger culling policy continues to be opposed by the majority of scientific experts, and remains deeply unpopular with a large section of the public.

There is considerable research evidence and experience demonstrating the central importance of cattle to cattle transmission, both within and between herds, in maintaining and disseminating the disease. Control strategies require wider recognition of other factors, including the limitations of the tuberculin test, more rigid cattle movement controls and heightened on-farm biosecurity. These measures are far more effective at reducing tuberculosis in cattle. Vaccination of both cattle and badgers may also have a role to play.

We agree with the President of the British Veterinary Association who questions the ethics of continuing to use controlled shooting as a method of culling when it has shown to be both ineffective and inhumane.

We urge the government to reconsider, immediately, its decision to continue and extend the culling of badgers.

Sincerely,

Professor Sir Patrick Bateson FRS, University of Cambridge

Professor Lord Krebs Kt FRS, University of Oxford

Professor John Bourne CBE MRCVS, former Chairman, Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB

Professor Ranald Munro MRCVS, Chairman, Independent Expert Panel on Badger cull pilots

Professor Claudio Sillero, University of Oxford

Professor Sheila Crispin FRCVS, Cumbria

Professor Alastair MacMillan MRCVS, Veterinary Advisor to Humane Society International/UK

Dr Tony Sainsbury MRCVS, Zoological Society of London

Dr Chris Cheeseman, Badger ecologist, Gloucestershire

Dr Mark Jones MRCVS, Policy Manager, Born Free Foundation

Jan Bayley, Animal Welfare Group, Gloucestershire