



What next for Bovine TB?

**Summary of report conclusions by The Bow Group
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With a cost of £4,121 per badger, the likely conclusion by the forthcoming report by the Independent Panel of Experts on the recent pilot of badger culls in Somerset and Gloucestershire that more badger culling will be of no benefit is particularly damning.

Added to this, we now have evidence that incidents of bovine TB is in fact decreasing without culling. The incidence rate for January-November 2013 down 4.5% and the number of cattle slaughtered down 9.5% is proof that cattle controls are working. Given that the badger cull trials were restricted to Somerset and Gloucestershire and only carried out in late 2013, it is inconceivable that these were a contributory factor.

In addition to our previous calls for vaccination of badgers and the rolling out of a cattle vaccine, we also believe the time is right for the establishing of an Independent panel for bovine TB policy making. This would both nullify the pressure lobby groups such as the NFU are able to exert on politicians as well as going some way to bringing the standoff between the two sides of the bTB debate to a conclusion.

The Paper's Author, G Godwin-Pearson says, "Unfortunately, the pilot badger culls in the rural Westcountry last year were a fiasco for the Party and for DEFRA, sparking national furore and condemnation from scientists, vets, charities, TV presenters, a certain rock star and the public at large.

"There are thousands of volunteers prepared to don wellies and help a national effort to vaccinate our most iconic wild animal against this horrible disease. The cost, which has always been a concern, will be far less than the £4,121 per badger that culling has amounted to and it will appeal to the country-folk and urbanites who took the time to sign petitions, write to their MP or even march against the culls. It's also a good example of the Big Society in action, by a nation of animal lovers, for the benefit of wildlife.

"The big question for the Cabinet is how to duck out of the commitment to culling it made to the NFU; the answer is simple - create an Independent Panel for bTB, with scientists, vets, wildlife experts, charities and landowners, selected for their knowledge of the subject, who can become the voice of unbiased reason for ministers."

The Bow Group's report opposing the culling of badgers makes the following recommendations:-

1. Work with conservation charities to rollout a national injectable BCG badger vaccination programme, as per the recommendation of the EFRA Select Committee.
2. Implement compulsory pre-movement testing between farms within the same holding and prior to agricultural shows and common land grazing.
3. Compel farms that have TB to declare their status to neighbouring holdings.
4. Enforce isolation regulations and slaughter any new-born calves of reactors.
5. Increase the use of the g-IFN test, alongside the SICCT test.
6. Take the lead, alongside a major commercial herd, in field trials of a cattle vaccine, in order to aid the progression of legislation to permit the license of cattle BCG in Europe and trading of vaccinated cattle.
7. Appoint an Independent Panel on bTB to advise the Government on bTB policy direction now and in the future.
8. Push for more intuitive agricultural subsidies from the EU which incentivises good management rather than simply encouraging high yields.