

CALLS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF BADGER CULLING TO HELP REDUCE THE LEVELS OF BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS (bTB) IN NORTHERN IRELAND ARE NOT JUSTIFIED.

RECENT REDUCTIONS IN bTB INCIDENCE HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED WITHOUT BADGER CULLING.

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT LIMITED CULLING OF BADGERS WILL ACTUALLY INCREASE THE INCIDENCE OF bTB IN CATTLE.

A TOTAL BADGER CULL WOULD BE UNFEASIBLE, EXPENSIVE AND CONTRARY TO THE BERN CONVENTION ON WILDLIFE CONSERVATION.

CATTLE MANAGEMENT REGIMES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A VACCINE ARE THE MOST LIKELY ROUTES TOWARDS DISEASE ERADICATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❏ Badger culling should not be employed as a control strategy as it is unlikely to contribute positively to the control of TB in cattle.
- ❏ Cattle to cattle transfers are the biggest contributing factor in the spread and persistence of bTB; therefore, we recommend the continuation of current cattle management and testing regimes, and continuing improvement in procedures.
- ❏ Research should be conducted into the direction of transmission between badgers and cattle.
- ❏ A vaccine should be developed for bTB and Northern Ireland's badger population should be inoculated.
- ❏ The newly formed TB Stakeholder Group should play a role in future decisions on the control of bTB in badgers.
- ❏ Bio-security on farms should be increased to prevent badger and cattle interaction, including measures to exclude badgers from cattle housing and feeding and water troughs.

BADGERS AND BOVINE TB

BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS:

1. **Bovine tuberculosis (bTB)** is an **infectious respiratory disease** that primarily affects cattle. The disease is also found in a number of wildlife species, such as deer and badgers, and can be transferred between different animal species.
2. In cattle bTB causes **poor growth rates and low milk yields**, while the management conditions by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) place a heavy burden on farmers. The disease is also expensive for the taxpayer as DARD compensates farmers for livestock culled.
3. In Northern Ireland the **occurrence of the disease in cattle has recently declined without badger culling** from a herd incidence of 9.92% in 2002 to 5.35% in 2007. Current disease control measures focus on cattle management and include animal testing, herd restrictions and the slaughter of infected cattle.

BADGERS AND bTB:

4. Badgers and cattle living in the same area are often infected with identical strain types. Therefore, it can be concluded that bTB infection is passing between the two species. However, **it cannot be said whether the transmission of the disease is from cattle to badgers or badgers to cattle.**
5. The most comprehensive study of the effect of badger management on bTB in cattle, the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBTC), was conducted by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) from 1998 to 2006 in England. The trial investigated the **effects of Proactive and Reactive culling on cattle bTB** prevalence:
 - *Reactive culling is the culling of badger social groups suspected of causing bTB outbreaks.*
 - *Proactive culling is the widespread culling of badgers in a selected area.*
6. The RBTC found that **reactive culling increased the incidence of tuberculosis by 27%, while proactive culling was associated with a reduction in tuberculosis of 23% inside the culling area but with an increase of bTB in herds neighbouring the trial area.** This can be explained by the impact that a culling programme has on the social behaviour and movement of badgers.
7. The 'Four Areas Badger Project' investigated the effect of proactive badger culling on bTB in cattle in Ireland. The results of this trial found that proactive culling reduced the incidents of bTB. However, the Four Areas Badger Project was conducted in areas that were bounded on all sides by features preventing badger movement. This may have improved the trial's results but is not a realistic condition occurring in the Northern Ireland countryside. **Despite continuing reactive culling in the Republic of Ireland, levels of bTB there are above the levels in NI and the Four Areas Trial report states that culling is not a long-term solution to the bTB problem.**
8. Based on the results of the field trials and on a Cost-Benefit Analysis of the proactive culling regime necessary to produce any net benefits, the ISG concluded that:

Badger culling is unlikely to contribute positively to the control of cattle bTB.

CONTROLLING bTB:

9. The Programme for Government has set a Public Service Agreement **target to reduce herd incidence of bTB by 27%** in the period 2008 to 2011. This target was set after veterinary analysis of Northern Ireland disease trends and is predicted to be **achievable with the implementation of current policies and without culling.**
10. The UK Government has recently announced that, "in line with the advice received from the Independent Scientific Group – **our policy will be not to issue any licences to farmers to cull badgers for TB control.**"
11. The UK Government also announced that £20 million will be invested over the next three years in **developing usable cattle and badger vaccines.**