

FALSE HOPES FOR FARMERS - THE TB PLAN THAT WON'T WORK - PAC Public meeting March 29th

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Growing opposition to the planned extermination of badgers was evident at the public meeting at Castell Malgwyn, Llechryd. Some 200 local people turned out to make their views known, many for the first time. Highlights of the meeting were Dr Mike Snow's history of culling efforts and research over the last 40 years, local vet Paul Rodgers' presentation arguing that a cull is necessary in this bovine TB 'hotspot', news of the legal challenge to the cull by the Badger Trust, and an introduction to police officers drafted in to monitor the cull if it goes ahead. Celia Thomas of Pembrokeshire Against the Cull chaired the meeting.

Police Sergeant Aled Davies said the 4-strong 'TB Police Team' based at Crymych will be impartial, act as a 'Community Tension Liaison Team', and apply the law equally to everyone. PS Davies thought that common sense would dictate pets could be set free if caught in a cull trap, but a full briefing was awaited. He did not know if police escorts will be provided to cull contractors visiting landowners who object to the cull, nor whether contractors coming on people's land will have had a Criminal Records Bureau check. One person had written to the Welsh Assembly about this but their reply was only that the contractors would have had an 'anti terrorist check', which was not reassuring and did not answer the question.

Dr Mike Snow, an ecologist, outlined the history of numerous culls and research over the last 40 years. A Randomised Badger Culling Trial was set up to clarify whether culling badgers reduces bovine TB in cattle. **After 10 years and killing 11,000 badgers, it concluded that culling cannot make a meaningful contribution to the reduction of bovine TB in cattle. Decreases in TB levels inside the cull areas were offset by increases in levels just outside the cull areas as a result of diseased badgers dispersing further afield. More research recently published shows that any small benefits had completely disappeared by the 3rd year following the cull and TB rates returned to previous levels.** Dr Snow said PAC believes vaccination is the answer. It may not have an immediate effect but will have much more longer term benefit - a healthier badger population and sustained lower rates of bovine TB.

Geoffrey Lauren's reported on the hearing of the Judicial Review brought by the Badger Trust which clearly established that **the most culling will achieve is a 6% to 9% reduction in the current rate of increase in herd breakdowns, and this small benefit lasts only for 2 years following 5 years of culling.** He said the Welsh Assembly Government has ignored its research into vaccination, which showed this could provide a reasonable and practical alternative to culling, and would be cheaper.

Yet another hole in the government plan appeared when Celia Thomas reported on the Cattle Control Measures seminar she attended as one of the 368 cattle farmers in the cull area. Though the Welsh Assembly has claimed that extra cattle control measures will be 'stringent', the only compulsory change is in the frequency of TB testing of cattle - increased from annually to 6 monthly. All the

biosecurity measures are voluntary, and farmers can still move cattle in and out of the cull area within the 60 day period that pre-movement testing covers now. There is nothing in place to monitor movements other than farmers notifying the British Cattle Movement Service themselves. ***‘Basically, it’s business as usual with one extra test per year. I am even more angry now, and it seems even more pointless to kill badgers’.***

Paul Rodgers then presented a vet’s point of view, explained the testing of cattle for bovine TB and pros and cons of vaccination, and highlighted the increasing incidence of breakdowns in the immunity of cattle herds in west Wales. Members of the audience agreed that a solution to bovine TB was needed, but an effective and long term solution which took account of all ways in which TB is transferred to and from cattle.

The meeting ended with the experiences of landowners who received unannounced visits by the government’s Animal Health team or contractors. One landowner who recently found two men on her track said there was **no way for landowners to check essential security and safety issues as they provide no advance notice, and no ID other than a photo and a telephone number.** This is very difficult if you have children on your land, and also if we could be liable for any accidents. She urged landowners to contact Animal Health to raise such questions as they must provide answers.