

A message from Pembrokeshire Against the Cull to farmers, landowners and residents in the badger cull area of West Wales

Pembrokeshire Against the Cull is a group of landowners, farmers and residents living in the vicinity of the proposed badger cull area (what the Welsh Assembly call the Intensive Action Pilot Area). We take bovine TB seriously and recognise its impact on the farming community. However, we oppose killing badgers as scientific trials have shown that it will not help – and could make the TB situation worse.

The following facts will help you make a more informed decision about the wisdom of the proposed badger cull. They are all based on rock-solid science, much of which has been laid out in open court. PAC will supply a list of references on request.

It is vital that landowners, before giving consent to the Assembly Government to cull badgers on their land, realise the true implications of this programme.

Facts about the cull

- **The badger cull will *not* cause cattle TB to decline in the pilot area.**

It will simply slow the *rate of increase* by a small amount for a temporary period. In previous culling trials, the incidence of cattle TB in culled areas was lower than that in un-culled areas, but both types of area experienced absolute *increases* in TB over time¹.

- ***Within the cull area, killing badgers is likely to make only a small and very temporary impact on cattle TB.***

The science predicts that culling badgers for 5 years in a perfectly circular 150km² area would prevent only 17 confirmed herd breakdowns during the cull period². Since about one third of breakdowns are unconfirmed (but still to lead to animal slaughter, movement restrictions etc), even this figure is an overestimate³. 2.5 years after the cull finishes, *this benefit disappears*².

- **Trial culls have caused almost as much cattle TB as they prevented. Farmers at the boundary and outside the area are at much increased risk of TB.**

The science also shows that, for the same ideal circular area, the cull would cause 12 extra herd breakdowns on surrounding land². This is thought to be due to disturbed badgers, some of which are TB carriers, moving further afield and increasing the number of herds that each badger could potentially contact. **In the Randomised Controlled Trials, the incidence of cattle TB rose by a massive 43% in these areas between the first and second badger culls**². These detrimental

effects are seen in some areas from the first year and continue to be observed in all years. After the cull finishes, there is no significant difference².

- **Badgers will not be killed all at once. This will spread TB within and around the cull area.**

Previous culling trials took place over 100km² areas. The Pembrokeshire pilot is nearly three times larger. For many reasons, it is highly unlikely that all badgers will be culled simultaneously. If you are a farmer in the cull area, and anyone around you has suffered had a TB outbreak, you will be at much higher risk yourself as soon as the cull commences. Any attempt by the Assembly to “parcel up” the cull area will greatly increase this risk.

- **The Welsh Assembly pilot area is nothing like “ideal” – putting even more farmers at risk**

In addition, the planned cull area is certainly not an ideal model. It is not circular – there are many peculiar shape anomalies. These increased edges put many more farmers at increased risk of TB outbreaks. The entire southern boundary is open farmland. The concept of “soft” boundaries, like sheep farming, has been rejected by the expert Independent Scientific Group⁴. One of the leading scientists on the RBCT has confirmed that the cull area is “not consistent” with scientific advice, as it is not geographically isolated. Previous culling trials used barriers as boundaries where possible, including coastline and major rivers, yet detrimental effects were highly consistent across areas⁵.

- **The prevalence of bTB goes up in the badger population once culling starts. Badger culling could well make the whole TB situation worse.**

Repeated culling causes the prevalence of TB infection among badgers to rise over time. This, combined with badgers’ expanded ranging, could increase the probability of badger-to-cattle transmission after the cull, undermining the beneficial effects of reduced badger density. Scientists responsible for the English trials say that cattle in the culled areas could now be facing *an increased risk of badger-transmitted TB infection*, compared to before the cull started².

- **A cull costs over three times more than the savings achieved through reduced cattle TB.**

Regardless of our land holding within the pilot area, we are all taxpayers. Over the five year period, the financial costs of culling far outweigh the savings achieved. For the “ideal” 150km² example, a very modest total of 22.6 breakdowns (out of 187) would be prevented over 7.5 years, saving £610,200. The cost of conducting five annual culls with cage trapping was estimated as £2.14 million². The actual cost of the Pembrokeshire cull has been given by WAG at between 9 and 10 million pounds⁶. WAG

admit that “a full cost benefit analysis for the culling of badgers” has not been undertaken⁷! How can this be justified in a recession?

- **There is no evidence that the Assembly’s “package” of measures will achieve any better results than a badger cull**

The Assembly constantly asserts that the pilot area is not just a badger cull. But, besides the fact that the cattle measures are inadequate (see below), it has commissioned no scientific work to investigate the likely benefits of improved cattle controls, either alone or in combination with a cull. Such a failure has been described by an expert scientist as “remarkable”, and leading to an “incomplete assessment of both the likely marginal benefits of badger culling, and the potential of cattle-based controls alone as a potential alternative”³.

- **A badger cull is planned every year for five years – at least.**

Every year, you will have armed contractors trapping and killing badgers on your land in the spring and summer

Facts about the cattle measures

- **Farmers will be subject to restrictions on practice that will not help them with the TB problem.**

The Assembly is set to spend over £9 million culling badgers, but will not put the necessary cattle controls in place that will really make a difference. The measures identified are less stringent than those recommended by the experts⁸. Farmers will therefore suffer the burden of increased restrictions, but there will be no TB benefits after the cull ends. There are plenty of examples:

- **The cattle testing in the cull area is inadequate**

Increased testing (currently 12 month test interval) is the one tried and tested method to reduce the incidence of TB. Despite scientific recommendation, there is no commitment to wider use of the more sensitive IFN- γ (Gamma Interferon) cattle test³. 6 monthly testing will be introduced in the pilot area, but mainly for “frequent movers” of cattle⁹. This means that some herds may not detect infection for many months at a time when the risk of infection is higher (during a cull), giving the disease plenty of time to spread. In Australia, where there was no wildlife reservoir, they insisted on 4 follow-up tests following a breakdown yet it took 27 years to eradicate bTB. Only 2 follow up tests are proposed for the pilot area (no change from existing practice)

- **The cattle movement controls in and out of the area are inadequate**

Expert scientists and local vets alike acknowledge limiting cattle movements is vital to reduce bTB. Again, despite scientific advice, there are no plans to control the movements of cattle within, into, or out of the area based on TB risk³. The Assembly only say this idea is “planned for the future” – after a badger cull could have made the problem worse⁹. A bull can still be pre-movement tested, come into the area from outside, stay 50 days after one test and move on, in or out of the cull area, and it might not be tested again for another 12 months. Farmers can still buy and sell stock at the weekly market - which is within the cull area!

- **The biosecurity measures are inadequate, unenforceable and illogical**

Biosecurity is a subjective evaluation done at the kitchen table. It is only voluntary, and unlikely to be effectively implemented or monitored. A yearly vet visit to discuss the issue will take place, but with no “on-site” monitoring. The Assembly’s biosecurity advice on very important matters is poor – for example, bTB can survive in the soil for up to 21 months, and stored slurry for up to 6 months. WAG only “recommends” that cattle do not graze pasture for only 2 months after slurry, manure, or dirty water has been applied on it¹⁰. Despite such contradictions, farmers could still be penalised if their “biosecurity score” is too high, through reduced compensation in the event of a TB breakdown⁹.

- **Herd breakdowns will not be “traceable”, due to the nature of bTB infections**

bTB is a resistant organism. It can remain latent in cattle for their lifetime, and become infectious at any time. This can account for closed herds experiencing breakdowns after 12 years clear of the disease. As few as 5 bacteria can infect an animal (usually in aerosol form)¹¹. Given these facts, and the likely chaotic nature of a poorly designed badger cull, causation of herd breakdowns will be impossible to ascertain.

Facts about vaccination of badgers

- **Vaccination is more likely to contribute to disease eradication than culling**

It is true that vaccination can only prevent new infections, not remove existing infection. However, about a quarter of adult badgers die each year. This means that annual vaccination would protect an increasing proportion of TB-free badgers and lead to a declining level of infection. In contrast, repeated culling increases the prevalence of infection among badgers, and causes the disease to spread in space, undermining the benefits for cattle³.

- **Vaccination works to control bTB**

The Assembly has commissioned studies, based on the all the most up-to-date science, to compare vaccination with culling. The predicted results, in terms of TB control, were only minimally different. The studies specifically said that vaccination *is* a viable alternative to culling¹².

- **Vaccination by injection is now licensed and will be used this year**

Defra have announced that the Veterinary Medicines Directorate issued an authorisation for Badger BCG vaccine in March 2010. This is the first tuberculosis vaccine authorised for use in badgers in the UK. The vaccine will be put to use in the Badger Vaccine Deployment Project in England. In contrast, Dr Glossop, WAG's Chief Vet, says only that vaccination may "eventually become a useful tool"¹³.

- **Vaccination by injection is cheaper than culling**

The proven method of vaccination by injection is estimated to be cheaper than culling. The Assembly's 2008 figures gave a cost of £2710 per km² per year for vaccination, compared with £2830 for culling¹². This figure is now substantially higher - WAG recently published an estimate of £4,200/km²/year¹⁴ for government-delivered cage trapping, following the commitment to conduct post-mortems on the badger carcasses.

- **Oral badger vaccines are expected to be available before the end of the Pembrokeshire cull**

An oral bait vaccine formulation is expected around 2014. The Assembly and the NFU have suggested that this could be an "exit strategy" from culling. So why make the problem worse with a cull beforehand?

- **Assembly statements on vaccination are contradictory and illogical**

Dr Glossop claimed in court that the benefits from vaccination are "not yet known"⁹. But she advised the Rural Affairs Minister that vaccination is "likely to take longer for benefits to the industry and taxpayer"³. So which is it to be – no different, not known, or longer to act? Besides, as shown above, culling costs rather than benefits the taxpayer!

These are the facts. Pembrokeshire Against The Cull believe that taken together, they present a compelling case against a badger cull, and in favour of vaccination. We also believe it is critical that farmers and landowners realise the implications for the bovine TB problem if this cull goes ahead. It is over to you.

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