

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Bovine TB

2 December 2013

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Owen Paterson) A key element in the comprehensive strategy this Government is finalising to eradicate bovine TB (bTB) in England within 25 years is successfully tackling the disease reservoir in the badger population.

Culling is only one part of our approach to tackle the spread of TB. We are using every tool available including tougher movement controls for cattle (the latest of which I announced to the House on 28th November (Col.23WS)), better biosecurity on farms and working to develop effective and usable cattle and badger vaccines. We continue to make good progress on all aspects of our draft strategy to eradicate the disease in England within 25 years.

The two badger control pilots, in Somerset and Gloucestershire, were designed to test the assumption that controlled shooting is a safe, humane and effective means of reducing badger numbers.

Natural England granted an 8-week extension in Gloucestershire on 23rd October, in line with the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO)'s advice.

Today I am announcing to the House that the extension period in Gloucestershire concluded on Saturday, 30th November at the behest of the cull company and the NFU, with the agreement of Natural England to coincide with the end of the open season for cage trapping.

The aim of the extension was to achieve the earliest and greatest possible impact on bTB in the area, in line with the CVO's advice that a further significant reduction of the badger population in the first year would increase the likelihood of disease benefits in cattle over the full four years of the cull.

The decision to extend has been shown to be the right one, with significant numbers of badgers removed at the point that the extension was ended. In the additional 5 weeks and 3 days of culling, 213 badgers have been removed, giving an overall total of 921. This represents a reduction of just under 40% in the estimated badger population before culling began.

The extension in Gloucestershire has therefore been successful in meeting its aim in preparing the ground for a fully effective four year cull. In the Randomised Badger Culling Trial there was a range of culling effectiveness across the ten areas in the first year of the culls, but the trial still showed overall benefits at the end of sustained culling and these benefits have been maintained for at least a further seven years. The two pilots in Gloucestershire and Somerset have similarly shown a range of culling

effectiveness and at the end of four years of sustained culling long-term overall benefits can be expected to be delivered.

The Independent Panel of Experts will now consider the information collected during the pilots on the safety, effectiveness and humaneness of controlled shooting. This will inform my decision on the wider roll-out of badger control in those parts of England most severely affected by this disease. The Independent Panel of Experts report will be made available to Parliament and the general public at that time.

While there are important lessons to learn, completing two pilots this year has been a significant achievement and is another major step towards halting the spread of bTB.

I would like to pay tribute to the local farmers and landowners who have undertaken the pilots in both areas, often in difficult terrain and weather, and often in the face of intimidation by a small minority who resorted to widespread criminality in their determination to stop this disease control policy.

It is unacceptable that in the ten years to 31 December 2012, more than 305,000 cattle were compulsorily slaughtered as reactors or direct contacts in Great Britain. Moreover, since 1 January to August, a further 22,512 otherwise healthy cattle have been slaughtered solely because of bovine TB.

Controlling the disease in wildlife is and will remain a key part of our TB Strategy – no country has successfully dealt with TB without tackling the disease in both wildlife and cattle. This Government is resolved to do this.

Achieving this aim will require long-term solutions and considerable national resolve. This Government is committed to tackling the disease in all reservoirs and by all available means.