

When Government u-turns on an issue they are often derided for doing so. But sometimes a politician is persuaded to alter their view on an issue and it can have quite a liberating effect. Earlier this week it happened to me. I'm not sure I've ever changed my mind on an issue so radically. I have quite a good gut instinct so to u-turn as I have was a bit discombobulating at first but now I know it is right and I am pleased I did.

The issue in question was the culling of badgers. It is an issue that has upset a huge number of my constituents but is one that is incredibly complex.

Bovine TB (bTB) affects farmers across the UK and last year led to the loss of 26,000 cattle. It costs the taxpayer millions in compensation because livestock with bTB cannot enter the food chain and has to be slaughtered. There is an indisputable link between badgers and the spread of TB so my first reaction was to be sympathetic to the farmers. Our agricultural industry needs all the support it can get and when a disease is killing off livestock and a solution is proposed to stop it then despite my strong record on animal welfare it was hard not to agree with it.

But therein lay the problem. The proposed solution to indiscriminately cull badgers will not stop the spread of bTB as highlighted by the published views of eminent scientists and disease experts. Furthermore, the night time shooting of badgers, whether they have bTB or not, will only reduce infections by 12-16% if undertaken intensively for many years and over large areas. When the facts are coupled with the sheer cruelty of killing animals that may be without infection or pregnant, it became much easier to change my mind.

I have written to every constituent who corresponded with me on this issue to thank them for pursuing this matter further. I am personally pleased that I undertook further consideration of this issue not just for animal welfare reasons, but based on the scientific facts.