

Bovine TB

Chief Veterinary Officer's advice on outcome of year 2 of the badger culls

Effectiveness of industry-led culling:

1. The outcome of this year's cull in Somerset indicates that industry-led culling can, in the right circumstances, deliver the level of effectiveness required to be confident of achieving disease control benefits.
2. Continued action is needed to increase levels of confidence in the effectiveness of any future culls, for example through contractor training and assessment, improved operational planning, monitoring and delivery.

Humaneness of controlled shooting:

3. The key aim for improvements for year 2 of the culls was to increase accuracy, and monitoring was targeted accordingly. Where a carcass is retrieved, evidence from 2013 and 2014 strongly suggests a rapid time to death and this year no observed shot led to a time to death of greater than 5 minutes. The IEP report on culling in 2013 associated shots in which the badger carcass was not retrieved with a risk of longer times to death. The retrieval rate in 2014 was slightly higher than that in 2013, but this is not a statistically significant difference.
4. Judgements on humaneness must, by definition, be subjective, and therefore there is room for disagreement on what constitutes humaneness. Based on the evidence of two annual culls, my view is that the likelihood of suffering in badgers culled by controlled shooting remains comparable with the range of outcomes reported when other culling activities, currently accepted by society, have been assessed, such as deer shooting.
5. Improvements should be pursued further to increase standards of accuracy in any future culls.

Conclusions on disease control benefits:

6. Given the level of badger population reduction estimated in the Somerset cull area in 2014, the benefits of reducing disease in cattle over the planned four-year cull can be expected to be realised there. The level of reduction achieved should be at least maintained to maximise these benefits. Culling should continue there in 2015, and at least for one further subsequent year.

7. Given the lower level of badger population reduction in the Gloucestershire cull area over the past two years, the benefits of reducing disease in cattle over the planned four year cull may not be realised there. Culling should continue there in 2015 provided there are reasonable grounds for confidence that it can be carried out more effectively that year through measures of the kind mentioned in paragraph 2, and should be maintained for at least one subsequent year to achieve a substantial reduction in the badger population. As there has been a slow start, we should consider whether culling should be repeated in future years beyond 2017 in order to increase the likelihood of reduced disease in cattle.

Nigel Gibbens
UK Chief Veterinary Officer

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