



Department
for Environment
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I am writing to confirm that today I am announcing a review of the government's Strategy to eradicate bovine tuberculosis (bTB) in England.

Five years into the current bTB Strategy, drafted in 2013 and published a year later, the time is right to review progress on the various elements of the strategy. I envisage that further reviews will take place at five yearly intervals in the future.

The purpose of the review is to consider progress made to date and to consider what further actions might need to be prioritised now in order to ensure that we maintain progress towards our target of becoming officially TB free after twenty five years.

As you know Bovine TB is a slow moving insidious disease which presents major challenges. It can be difficult to detect; it can be harboured in the wildlife population; no vaccine is fully effective and none of our diagnostic tests are perfect. The review will be forward looking. Its aim is to identify what actions we could take now to ensure that other elements of the strategy such as cattle vaccination or improved genetic resistance, are ready to deploy at later phases of the strategy.

We now have over twenty cull zones that are operational and we envisage additional ones for 2018. Although it is too early to make definitive conclusions, early analysis suggests that the first two cull zones are seeing the anticipated impact in terms of reduced incidence of the disease. However, we do need to consider what further steps or actions should follow the conclusion of each four year cull. After all, none of us wants to be culling badgers forever. The review will therefore also consider such issues.

The review will be led and overseen by an external Chair and I am delighted that Professor Sir Charles Godfray has agreed to take on this role. Professor Godfray is a population biologist with interests including ecology and epidemiology, currently based at the University of Oxford where he is Director of the Oxford Martin School. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Society. He chaired the Independent Scientific Review of the Randomised Badger Control Trial, and is Chair of Defra's Science Advisory Council.

The Chair will be supported by a small working group, membership of which will be confirmed in due course. The Chief Veterinary Officer and the Director of Animal and Plant Health will provide oversight within the Department.

The review is expected to commence in March and complete by the end of September 2018. The findings will be submitted to Defra Ministers for consideration and a final report published in due course.

As well as this work, Defra has today launched a consultation on the principle of allowing badger control in the Low Risk Area to enable rapid action to tackle outbreaks at the local level where there is evidence of infection in badgers and linked with infection in cattle, and help preserve the area's low disease incidence. Any decision on whether or not to implement badger control in the Low Risk Area will be taken following the consultation, once all the responses have been considered alongside relevant scientific evidence and veterinary advice.

The terms of reference for the review and the consultation have been published on the GOV.UK website and placed in the Libraries of the House

With every good wish

MICHAEL GOVE

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