




Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

3 August 2012

received 10/8

TD
Nigel Gibbens
Chief Veterinary Officer
Defra
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

TO Comms
for advice and direct
reply by 24 August
please.

thanks 

10/8

Dear Nigel,

It was very good to meet you at the beginning of July. I found our conversation extremely useful, notably the discussion on the looming equine crisis which is creating enormous pressure on the RSPCA's resources. I have asked James Yeates to keep you informed on our ongoing work in that field.

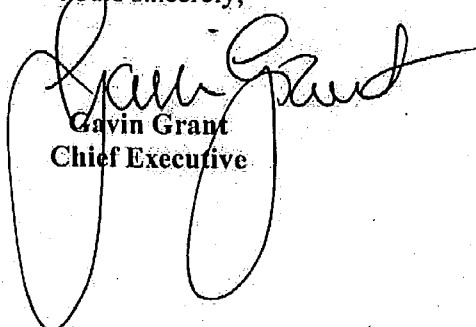
I write with regard to another matter, namely badgers. You will be aware the RSPCA is opposed to the policy of culling badgers to control bovine tuberculosis. However, if the proposed pilot culls do proceed this autumn, I am concerned at the lack of transparency about how the humaneness of shooting badgers is to be assessed.

Defra's December policy statement lacks detail stating simply that there will be some 'veterinary assessment based on field observations and post-mortem examination of a selection of carcasses'. Such a general statement clearly begs questions such as: - What personnel will be undertaking the veterinary field observations? How many of them will there be? How will they effectively cover operations extending over very large areas each some 300 Km² in size? What percentage of carcasses will be assessed? How will the carcasses for examination be selected?

Defra appear to place much responsibility on the panel of independent experts to advise on appropriate methods for monitoring effectiveness and humaneness. However, little information is available about the operation of the panel and how such issues will be addressed. As the time of writing the only information about the panel's operation are two brief notes of initial meetings held in March.

I would very much welcome some clarification on these aspects.

Yours sincerely,


Gavin Grant
Chief Executive

Gavin Grant
Chief Executive
RSPCA, Wilberforce Way
Southwater, Horsham
West Sussex RH13 9RS
Tel 0300 123 0100
Fax 0303 123 0100
DX 157200 HORSHAM 7
A charity registered in
England & Wales
Charity no. 219099
www.rspca.org.uk
Patron HM The Queen
Vice Patron His Grace
The Archbishop of Canterbury



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR
United Kingdom

T [REDACTED]
www.defra.gov.uk

Gavin Grant
Chief Executive
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty
to Animals
Wilberforce Way
Southwater
Horsham
West Sussex
RH13 9RS

15 August 2012

From Nigel Gibbens
Chief Veterinary Officer

Dear Mr Grant,

Thank you for your letter of 7 August about how the humaneness of controlled shooting of badgers within the pilot areas will be assessed. It was good to meet you in July and I too found our discussion useful.

In December last year the Secretary of State announced that two pilot badger culls will go ahead in 2012 and that these pilot areas will be closely monitored to test our assumptions on the humaneness, effectiveness and safety of controlled shooting. Any decision by Ministers to extend culling to other areas, will take account of these findings, amongst other factors.

An Independent Panel of Experts has been set up to oversee the monitoring of humaneness, effectiveness and safety of controlled shooting and report their findings to Ministers. The Chair, Professor Christopher Wathes, and six panel members, are leading experts in their fields and bring a broad range of experience to advise on the development of the monitoring protocols. I recall that the RSPCA was invited to participate in the scrutiny of this work back when colleagues met with Defra officials to discuss the policy in September last year, but declined to take part.

Defra's scientific agencies have developed the monitoring protocols, which have now all undergone significant scrutiny by the Panel to ensure that the data, and the means by which they are collected, are as scientifically robust as possible. For the humaneness assessment researchers will carry out field observations of operators shooting badgers using both rifles and shotguns and will also carry out post-mortems on a sample of badger carcasses that have and have not been observed being shot. The Panel has advised on the number of samples that would be required to have scientific confidence in the data

collected, both for field observations and post mortems. These requirements, as well as Health and Safety, will influence the number of staff that are in the field and also the number of carcasses that will undergo post mortem examination. You will understand that for security reasons we are unable to provide further details of personnel or how they will conduct operations in the field. The researchers will report their findings directly to the Panel, who will then write and submit their own report to Ministers on the robustness of their findings.

Operators, already expected to be competent shooters, must follow the published Best Practice Guidance and have passed a Government approved training course. Further details of these requirements may be found at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animal-diseases/a-z/bovine-tb/>.

We are considering whether we will publish summaries of the protocols on the Defra website once they have been finalised. If we do so we will let you know.

Yours sincerely



NP NIGEL GIBBENS