



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk  
www.defra.gov.uk

Our ref: RFI 5950  
Date: 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Dear [REDACTED]

## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: NUMBERS OF CULLED BADGERS INFECTED WITH TB

Thank you for your request for information about sick badgers and testing for TB in the pilot culls, which we received on 25 October. We have handled your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

The EIRs apply to requests for environmental information, which is a broad category of information defined in regulation 2 of the EIRs. Public authorities are required to handle requests for environmental information under the EIRs. They give similar access rights to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

The questions you raised and the responses are below:

**Question 1: Exactly what proportion of culled badgers were you referring to when you stated, in your response to Angela Smith MP on 10 October that ‘...some of the animals we have shot have been desperately sick’?**

**And**

**Question 2: How and by whom was it ascertained, in the absence of testing for bovine TB, that the ‘desperately sick’ animals to which you refer were suffering from clinical disease caused by *Mycobacterium bovis* infection?**

**And**

**Question 3: Why have the carcasses from badgers shot during the pilot trials to date not been tested for the presence of *Mycobacterium bovis*?**

A sample of culled badgers has been subjected to post mortem examination for the purpose of monitoring humaneness, and any signs of illness or poor condition have been noted as part of the procedure. This would include outward signs of a chronic condition such as would occur with TB. The results of the post-mortems with respect to the



humanness objectives will be included in the official report into the culls. Preparation of this report is underway at present and the finalised numbers will be published in the New Year.

Testing badger carcasses for TB has not been undertaken on a routine basis during the pilot cull. This decision was taken before the culls commenced. However, a small number of carcasses have been tested on occasion at the specific request of landowners.

The decision not to test culled badgers for TB in the pilots was taken because we already have information on TB infection in badgers in the regions in which the cull areas are located from the Randomised Badger Cull Trial (RBCT). In addition, the nature of the pilot culls would make testing for TB insensitive (please see further comments on this below). A link to the report on the RBCT, which summarises the Trial's results and which contains an accompanying literature review, is below. Pages 72 to 77 will be of particular interest.

[http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/atoz/tb/isg/report/final\\_report.pdf](http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/atoz/tb/isg/report/final_report.pdf)

I have also attached a link to an annex which was published as part of the 2010 consultation 'Bovine tuberculosis: the Government's approach to tackling the disease and consultation on a badger control policy'. The annex contains more information on badgers and TB.

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110203030352/http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/tb-control-measures/100915-tb-control-measures-annexa.pdf>

**Question 4: What exactly did you mean when you stated, in your answer to Philip Hollowbone of 10 October, that 'carcasses that have been shot would not give an accurate reading following post-mortem' when well-established methods exist for the testing of carcasses for the presence of *Mycobacterium bovis*?**

The possibility of a roll out of testing all culled badgers for TB was considered. However a number of technical and logistical problems emerged which led to Government deciding against testing.

The "gold standard" diagnostic to test carcasses for TB is to look for lesions and culture tissue for the organism. However the nature of the cull operations meant that getting the required samples would be challenging and this would substantially affect the reliability of the test results.

In theory, it would be possible to take a post-mortem blood sample for testing. However it is technically difficult to get samples from carcasses, and the sett-side test has a low sensitivity meaning it does not detect all truly infected animals.

The only blood test suitable for use on samples from carcasses is the TB Stat-Pak, an antibody blood test. The Stat-Pak test can be run on a very small amount of blood, and gives a read-out within 20 minutes, but it has a sensitivity of 35% (The only other potential

test, the gamma interferon test, can only be used on samples taken from live, anaesthetised animals and cannot be performed on samples from carcasses, even if taken very soon after death).

The simplest way of obtaining blood from a dead badger would be to take a sample from the heart using a large syringe and needle in the field. Blood samples could have been taken by the shooters appointed by the cull companies. However, there were two issues with this process. Firstly, shooters would be untrained in veterinary techniques. Secondly, it was thought that adverse weather and interference from protestors could hamper efforts to carry out the test in the field. An alternative option which was considered was for veterinary staff to take blood samples from shot badgers in the field. However the issue of bad weather and protest would still apply.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the EIRs, and in keeping with the government's Transparency Agenda, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. Therefore, the information released to you will now be published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. Please note that this will not include your personal data.

I also attach an annex giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

**Defra TB Programme**

**Email:** [ccu.correspondence@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ccu.correspondence@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

## **Annex**

### **Complaints**

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 18 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Mike Kaye, Head of Information Standards, Area 4D, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR (email: [requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk)) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our [website](#).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF