



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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www.defra.gov.uk

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Our ref: RFI 6121
Date: 21 January 2014

Dear [REDACTED],

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Evidence to support the Pilot Badger Culls

Thank you for your request for information about evidence which informs the badger culling policy which we received on 19 December. 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).

You asked for information which proves that badgers spread tuberculosis to cattle. The points you raised and our responses are below:

Point A: There being more than 49 different strains of Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB), how many times has the same strain of bTB bacteria been found in cattle reactors on a designated farm as in the culled badgers belonging to the local badger clan?

Answer: It is widely accepted by the scientific community that badgers are a major reservoir of bTB in the UK. The results of the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT) showed clearly that proactive badger culling, coordinated over a large area, sustained for at least four years, can lead to an overall reduction in TB in cattle in the culled area and land up to 2km away. In 55 culling operations where spoligotypes (genetic variants) were identified in both cattle and neighbouring culled badgers, 51 of these (94%) shared the same spoligotype. The link to the RBCT report is

http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/atoz/tb/isg/report/final_report.pdf



For further background reading, please see Woodroffe et al, Journal of Wildlife Diseases, 45(1), 2009, pp. 128–143.

Point B: *How many badgers in the Pilot Scheme did the Defra laboratories find at post mortem had any strains of bTB?*

Answer: At the outset of the cull, it had been decided that testing for bTB in badger carcasses would not be carried out as the RBCT had already established the presence of bTB in badgers. However during the cull a very small number of badgers were tested for bTB at the specific request of landowners if a badger appeared to be sick or in poor condition. You should note that most culled badgers were not examined for bTB therefore the prevalence of bTB in these badgers is not known.

Point C: *How many culled badgers did Defra vets find at post mortem that had the same strain of bTB as the reactors on the designated farms?*

Answer: As mentioned at point B, badgers which were subjected to post mortem were not routinely tested for bTB. On the rare occasions where testing was carried out, no steps were taken to identify which strain(s) of bTB, if any, were present.

Defra has publicly committed¹ on numerous occasions to announcing that an official report on the culls will be published by February/March 2014. This report will include the suite of data from the culls including results from post mortems.

You also asked us to point out any factual inaccuracies in Document 2.

You commented that there has been no evidence shown to the public that badgers transmit TB to cattle, but is incorrect. The RBCT showed that badger culling can affect the incidence of TB in cattle depending on how and where it is done showing that badgers transmit TB to cattle. The report can be found at the link above.

The prevalence of TB in badgers is much higher than the 0.37% stated in Document 2. In fact it can reach up to 30% depending on the tests used and the population being studied.(Please see the ISG report linked to the RBCT report above and Delahay et al., 2013 Epidem Infect doi:10.1017/S0950268813000721.)

Vaccines are not used in the tuberculin skin tests and the strain of *Mycobacterium bovis* used to prepare tuberculin is known.

You also raised three questions in the 'In Conclusion' section of the 'Please Note' document at the end of your letter

¹ <http://transparency.number10.gov.uk/business-plan/10/35>

Question I: *When is Natural England going to conduct its licensing system in an honest and straightforward way elevating the terrible cruelty to wildlife eradication by starvation/land clearance; is it the continuing way forward for Natural England?*

Answer: Defra would like to assure you that Natural England are not trying to elevate cruelty to wildlife by starvation or land clearance. They are not seeking to remove sources of food for badgers at any location and land clearance is not in Natural England's remit, but is in the hands of local authorities, developers and land owners.

Question II: *The Badger Cull. Please inform me why the knowledge accumulated over the past five decades regarding the identifying of the strains of bTB, movements in the National Dairy Herd and wildlife not been made public.*

Answer: Information on bovine TB strains in cattle is in the public domain see p.49 onwards of the 2012 surveillance report which can be found at:
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/files/pub-survreport-tb12.pdf>.

Data on cattle movement and TB testing can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/other-tb-statistics>

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/files/pub-survreport-tb12e.pdf>

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/files/pub-survreport-tb12.pdf>

Question III: *What value does Natural England put on a child's life? Bearing in mind (a) wasp nest entrances are nearly always old mouse holes and parties picnicking often enjoy sitting on the ground and (b) badgers destroy thousands of wasp nests every year?*

Answer: Natural England's work includes amongst other things conservation, access to the countryside and land stewardship. Public safety is captured under some of their responsibilities, such as safety for volunteers working with wildlife and Natural England takes its responsibilities seriously. If you would like information on the incidence of injuries from wasp stings, then I would advise you to contact the Department of Health.

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 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 have attached 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

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) 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