

Extract from email sent on 24 May 2022 at 14:24 from a Defra press officer [name withheld] to Ele Brown

**Subject:** RE: Policy to input I Media handling – [Redacted] TB letter response

**Media handling – [Redacted]**

**TB letter response**

**To:** Defra policy  
**Cleared by:**  
**Deadline:** ASAP

**Issue:**

In March 2022, [Redacted] – alongside other anti-cull campaigners [Redacted] and [Redacted] – published a paper about the impact of badger culling on bovine TB disease levels in the high risk area of England.

The paper concluded that the badger cull has made ‘no meaningful contribution’ to the control of bovine TB in these areas. At the time, our scientists reviewed the paper and found that its analysis was scientifically flawed. We found that it had manipulated data in a way that makes it hard to see the effects of badger culling and therefore its conclusions were wrong. We strongly rebutted these claims in briefings to media outlets and also on the CVO blog site following a letter signed by the CVO and CSA was published in the Veterinary Record, alongside the original paper.

We have since updated the graph associated with that letter, having found an error in the unculled area bars, but the key arguments in the letter still stand.

[Redacted] has sent two letters (**Annex B**) to the department (the first letter from [Redacted] solicitors dated 28 April and the second from [Redacted] dated 10 May 2022), specifying the following demands:

- An immediate end to badger culling.
- Data underpinning the graph in the CVO/CSA rebuttal to [Redacted] paper
- Copies of correspondence between Defra and the Veterinary Record/British Veterinary Association in respect of the proposed and actual publication of [Redacted] paper.
- An immediate public correction on the CVO's blog about his paper.
- A public apology for and retraction of Defra's press statement in response to [Redacted] paper.
- That we refer this matter to the Council for Science Editors, the Defra Science Advisory Council and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

In our response to these letters, we will confirm to [Redacted] that the badger culling will continue and the matter will not be referred ~~to the relevant bodies~~. We have already provided the data underpinning our graphs and apologised for the error, but this doesn't change our opinion on ~~the analysis~~. [Redacted]

**Background briefing:**

- APHA scientists and the Chief Vet and Chief Scientific Adviser reviewed the paper and found that the analysis was scientifically flawed. It manipulated data in a way that makes it impossible to see the actual effects of badger culling and therefore its conclusions are wrong.

- National statistics show that our bovine TB eradication strategy is working. Published scientifically rigorous analysis of the disease shows that licensed badger culling is helping to drive down bTB in cull areas. We do not want to continue the cull indefinitely, which is why we are moving to the next phase of our long-term strategy, with new intensive cull licences being issued for the final time this year and improved testing and cattle vaccination when available so that we can eradicate this insidious disease.
- The Chief Vet and Chief Scientific Advisor published a rebuttal letter in Vet Record.
- A more appropriate inspection of the publicly available data shows clear declining trends in bovine TB incidence **in cull areas** following the start of badger culling which is not seen in areas without culling.
  - For example, TB incidence in the areas where culling started in 2016 has dropped from 17.2 OTFw breakdowns per hundred herd years at risk in 2016-17, to 8.7 in 2019-20. Similarly in the areas where culling started in 2017 it dropped from 15.3 in 2017-18 to 8.4 in 2019-20. In contrast, in the parts of the High Risk Area where no culling took place incidence has remained **relatively** stable fluctuating between 10.9 and 12.8.
  - This is a reduction in OTFw herd incidence of 50% in the fourth year of culling and 45% in the third year of culling.
- We welcome the authors' conclusion, which corroborates Defra's published national statistics, that bTB incidence is on a downward trend in the HRA, showing that the TB Eradication Strategy for England is working.

## **Annex C – Defensive Q&A:**

### **Why haven't you called an immediate end to badger culling?**

The CVO and CSA have detailed their concerns about [Redated] analysis.

The weight of all available evidence indicates that our bovine TB eradication strategy is working. Published scientifically rigorous analysis of the disease shows that licensed badger culling is helping to drive down bTB in cull areas.

We do not want to continue the cull indefinitely, which is why we are moving to the next phase of our long-term strategy, with new intensive cull licences being issued for the final time this year and improved testing and cattle vaccination when available so that we can eradicate this insidious disease.

### **Why didn't you provide the data underpinning the graph in the CVO and CSA rebuttal in Vet Record?**

This is not true. We have explained our work and how the new graph was generated to [Redated] **through** our correspondence.

### **Have you shared the correspondence between Defra and Vet Record with [Redated] ?**

Yes, the relevant correspondence from Defra to the Vet Record and BVA. **[DN to check once we reply]**

### **Will you correct the CVO's blog on the [Redated] paper?**

Yes, we have corrected the blog.

**Will you retract and publicly apologise for the media statement about the [Redated] paper?**

No. The Veterinary Record has published a correction in relation to the error in the original graph, which did not alter the conclusions in the CVO and CSA rebuttal.

**Have you referred this matter to the Council for Science Editors, the Defra Science Advisory Council and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee?**

No, we see no justification for doing so. Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser is fully aware of the issue and able to draw upon expert independent advice from the Defra Science Advisory Council as required.

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