

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS
Green Party

for the South East of England

Bovine TB and Badgers Consultation,
DEFRA,
1a Page Street,
London SW1 4PQ

March 2nd 2006

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for this opportunity to put forward my views on whether or not to introduce a cull of badgers to help control TB in cattle in the UK. I believe that a culling policy, be it targeted, individual or general, would be counter-productive for a number of reasons:

- 1) The Krebs Review of 1996 said that more work was needed to investigate the impact of badger culling on incidences of bovine TB, as there was still a lack of scientific data. A trial, carried out by an Independent Review Team on behalf of the government and to gather the necessary data, has not yet reported its findings. I would argue that any decision taken without consultees having had access to the results of this trial is likely to be flawed. This is of particular importance given that the trial's interim report, published autumn 2005, states ' We conclude that reactive culling as performed in the randomised badger culling trial cannot contribute constructively to the control of bovine TB in Britain'. I find it surprising that DEFRA has chosen to carry out this consultation, and is presumably intending to adopt a position, before the full results of the trial are published. Indeed, I am worried that this indicates DEFRA is deliberately sidelining evidence that appears to come down against any kind of culling policy.
- 2) The Bern Convention commits the United Kingdom to working 'to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats'. Given that badger populations across the rest of Europe are in decline, the UK has a responsibility to properly protect its badger population. The 1992 Badger Act is designed to protect the badger from acts of cruelty, yet many healthy animals would die if a culling policy, whatever its scope, were introduced. I believe this would constitute an act of cruelty and is against the spirit of the 1992 legislation, whether gassing, shooting or snaring is the method used.
- 3) Ben Bradshaw MP has told the House of Commons that 'cattle to cattle' transmission is responsible for up to 80% of bovine TB outbreaks¹. I believe that focussing on the role of badgers in the spread of bovine TB is a distraction and that priority should instead be given to preventing the spread of the disease between cattle. According to The Badger Trust, a tight cattle TB testing regime introduced in Northern Ireland in 2004 has already resulted in a 40% reduction in outbreaks of the disease. Restrictions on cattle movement, research into vaccination and measures to restrict contact between badgers and cattle should also be given high priority. The government should make financial support available to farmers in order to cover the costs of a better testing regime.

¹ *Hansard* 12 Dec 2005 : Column 1589W

- 4) Culling does not work as a means of preventing the spread of bovine TB. The government's own culling and removal based interim strategy led to an increase of bovine TB cases in South West England, and cases developing in areas that had previously been free from the disease. There is also evidence from DEFRA's current trial that culling leads to the disease rate increasing in other areas - badgers move into the vacuum created by a geographically selective cull, ferry the bovine TB bacteria back to their original habitats, and expose additional cattle and badgers to the disease.
- 5) The government's current strategy on controlling bovine TB is heavily weighted in favour of measures designed to reduce exposure. This is at the expense of work that focuses on factors affecting susceptibility to the bacteria, despite what is known about these factors in human TB. The strategy must start to redress this balance by funding research to identify whether or not there is a correlation between rates of the disease and intensive farming practices. Given that bovine TB is a respiratory disease, passed between cattle in close contact with one another, it is incumbent upon DEFRA to first tackle the role potentially played by poor animal welfare standards. Other research might focus on issues such as immunity, which some veterinarians believe can be developed by employing measures that counter over exposure to iron-rich foods, a possible cause of TB in both cattle and badgers. This kind of study - to better understand what is causing the 18% annual increase in bovine TB cases of recent years - must take precedence over a cull that would be costly from a financial, ethical and environmental perspective.

I hope you will take these points into account when considering a culling policy and I would appreciate being kept informed of the outcome of the consultation.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.