BADGERS AND BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS:
URGENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
SUSTAINABLE DISEASE MANAGEMENT:
UNITED KINGDOM, IRELAND, FRANCE, THE NETHERLANDS

FIRST REPORT

A Report to the European Union and EU Member States by EUROBADGER: the Federation of European Badger Protection Organisations. April 2016

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Supported by:
Summary

- EUROBADGER: the Federation of European Badger Protection Organisations, calls upon MEPS, the European Commission and EU Member States, to combine forces and to outlaw the mass-killing of badgers across Europe.

- In particular, Eurobadger calls upon European institutions and Member States to address the false attributing of significant Bovine tuberculosis (bTB) transmission to cattle by badger Meles meles. To recognise that the disease is primarily spread among and between cattle, and that the limitations of statutory testing programmes, inadequate biosecurity, and a lack of focus on cattle-related control measures, all hinder a sustainable solution.

In a series of national reports prepared by experts on the ground from the United Kingdom, Ireland, France and the Netherlands - the flawed scientific case for mass badger killing has been exposed.

After decades of repeated killings, while bTB is clearly found in wild animals, evidence of transmission to cattle in the field is lacking. Wildlife culling has been extensively employed by governments and industry for 40 years, but has failed to demonstrate meaningful contribution to bTB reduction. Meanwhile in many areas bTB is spreading or is potentially out of control.

Over 100 million Euros has been spent over the last 20 years slaughtering badgers with public funds, primarily in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, often employing cruel techniques, and with no clear benefit. It is done contrary to general public opinion.

This massive unsustainable waste of public funds needs to stop, in order that money can be directed to proven methods of tackling the disease.

THE CRISIS FOR BOTH THE LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY AND FOR WILDLIFE PROTECTION IS TODAY

URGENT ACTION NEEDED IN 2016

- European Commission funding for bTB control must be contingent on rational and evidence-based national policy towards badger protection.

- Countries must stop driving the beef and dairy industries into the ground by competing with world market pricing. We “Healthy Food from Happy Farmers at the Right Price”.

- Farmers and veterinarians need to be provided with sound, evidence-based advice, routed in competent research.

- Proven and often tough cattle-based measures, including rigorous bTB testing, movement controls, risk-based trading and herd depopulation need to be implemented.
Background

Eurobadger is concerned about all forms of mass killing of badgers, including:

- The mass killing of badgers in the control of bovine tuberculosis in cattle
- The increasing numbers killed on our ever growing and busier road networks
- The persecution of badgers – a criminal offence in some countries
- The unmitigated displacement of badgers through housing and industrial development

This report concerns the cattle disease bovine tuberculosis and badgers. It draws upon reviews in 2016 by national badger experts and specialist organisations from the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) The Republic of Ireland, The Netherlands and France. Some of these countries have TB-Free status (NL, Scotland), while in others bovine tuberculosis has seen a resurgence since the disease was successfully brought under control from the middle of the last century, through strict testing and herd depopulation measures.

The fruitless and wasteful growing annual cost of € millions of public funding on badger killing practices has triggered significant protest from within the veterinary and scientific communities, and public outcry particularly in England in the form of large public street protests. These concerns herald an urgent need for change. Greater scrutiny is needed of unscientific and poorly constructed policies involving badger culling. Culling in countries in which bTB has resurged through loss of focus on disease control by successive governments and industry, principally the UK, Ireland, France and Spain. Bordering countries are now also at risk of a large scale increase in bovine TB invasion and spread.

Cruel killing of badgers with snares and ‘free’ shooting with guns at night, accompanies official governmental policies, with no demonstrable effect on bTB levels.
The last two decades have seen the introduction of mass culling of badgers in the Republic of Ireland, and more recently the UK, using cruel and unjustified methods including snaring and ‘free’ or so-called ‘controlled shooting’. These policies confuse and complicate disease management, and result in serious animal welfare and nature conservation concerns.

With badgers the grave problem of government actions terrorising and wounding badgers has unbelievably included the use of wire snares in the Republic of Ireland. The sending of wounded and bleeding badgers back to their setts following poor marksmanship is a veterinary and disease managers’ worst outcome in England. These are warning signs of desperation.

How has it come to this sorry situation? Bovine tuberculosis is a complex problem requiring a multidisciplinary approach drawing on a broad spectrum of skills and knowledge. Yet in England in particular, current policy fails to follow an evidence-based approach, and uses public money to pursue what appear to be politically-motivated actions despite concern and opposition expressed by leading independent disease scientists and public opinion.

Over 10,000 people took to the streets in England in 2013-15 to protest about bad government policy in bovine TB control in England and the shocking mistreatment of badgers.
Finding A Way Forward

calls upon the European Union, European Members of Parliament and EU Member States to take immediate steps to prevent further targeting of badgers in bovine TB control policies, and instead recommend the implementation of proven effective measures for controlling the spread of bovine tuberculosis in cattle, including:

- Significantly increase, to levels seen in the last century, the current level of tuberculin skin, gamma interferon and other testing on all cattle, and implement strict cattle movements and risk-based trading within and between High, Medium and Low Risk Areas. This must include pre and post movement testing over sufficient time periods to prevent disease spread. (Fr, RoI, UK)

- Stop immediately all bovine TB-related badger killing responses/programmes (Fr, RoI, UK)

- Reinstate whole-herd depopulation of bTB infected herds with immediate effect High Risk Areas in which bovine TB is endemic and persistent (Countries or regions as appropriate)

- Ban all movements from High Risk Areas and facilitate the rapid introduction of cattle vaccination programmes with ear tag linked pit-tag passport recognition and simple designated slaughter inspection system in High Risk Areas (Countries or regions as appropriate)

- Instigate monitoring of bTB background levels in selected wild animals using road kills and develop suitable livestock/wildlife management and biosecurity protocols for farm advisors. (All countries)

- Step up, with 5-year targets for real-time use, all vaccination and related research, pilots and licensing tests. (All countries)

Bovine Tuberculosis More Recently

The transfer of bovine TB by badgers to cattle in open countryside is unproven, and there is no clear scientific evidence directly linking badgers to significant outbreaks of bovine tuberculosis in cattle. The science behind claims for impacts of badger culling on bovine TB in cattle is at best tenuous.

Controlling the spread of Bovine TB among cattle is compromised by the poor sensitivity of the individual cattle tests in widespread use, which may miss between 20-50% of infected cattle, leaving infection to spread within the herd. With such a low sensitivity, the bovine TB tests need to be used frequently and interpreted severely, and consideration must be given to whole herd depopulation (used in France and Ireland, but to date avoided in England) where the disease is endemic. Economic pressures are preventing the restrictions on cattle movements from infected areas that are clearly necessary if spread of the disease is to be controlled.
Wider Effects of Badger Culling

Large carnivores such as lions, bears, wolves and lynx have been extirpated from much of Europe’s territory. Despite recovery efforts for some species, the natural influence of such large wild animals that shape and structure our natural ecosystems, is restricted today to small and fragmented areas.

As a result, in most areas the smaller - middle or meso-predator such as foxes and badgers have adjusted their roles, in the absence of larger competitors. They now form a new upper tier of mammals across much of Europe. These animals are often considered as a nuisance when they forage close to human habitation, and are persecuted in the name of disease control. Many people however are tolerant and wish to live peacefully with nature and devise ways to do this.

Mesopredator culling can have a destabilising effect on local wildlife, particularly in and around nature reserves and other wild habitats. It may be a major contributing factor for the modern decline in many species of wildlife, especially when culling causes the numbers of smaller predators to increase and grazing patterns of herbivores are altered.

Managing and predicting such change is a sophisticated process that has been largely overlooked in culling operations, despite its potential importance. Such safeguards are a legal obligation and should be subject to detailed guidelines and public consultation as is required by EU legislation and in many cases national law.

Neglected Remedies

Despite stated intentions by the RoI and UK governments, the development and use of TB vaccination in both badgers in cattle has been extremely limited and repeatedly stalled. While this may be in part because of technical difficulties distinguishing between infected and vaccinated animals, nevertheless there is a suspicion of a reluctance to pursue vaccination for short-term economic expediency irrespective of long term cost and damage. Repetition, that solutions could be 10-years away, are now decades old and redundant.

Vaccination may be appropriate for widespread use, or there may be a role for selective vaccine use in high risk areas or other specific circumstances. The current crisis in relation to bovine TB indicates that new approaches and actions are urgently needed.

In terms of cattle controls, fraud and other activity involving the removal/swapping of cattle ear tags is well documented. It is probably under reported/detected in some regions. Microchipping, with the chip linked to ear tag number is much less susceptible to interference and lends itself to automated recording and tracking. This technology is already in place in dairy farms, to monitor the milk production of individual cows and its use could be greatly widened to combat fraudulent activities.
The EUROBADGER 4-Point Plan

1 Cattle management

- Significantly increase the current level of tuberculin skin, gamma interferon and other testing on all cattle and cattle movements in High, Medium and Low Risk bTB Areas. This must include pre and post movement testing over sufficient time periods to prevent disease spread. (Fr, RoI, UK)

- Reinstate whole-herd depopulation of bTB infected herds with immediate effect in circumstances where disease is embedded or chronic levels in herds (All)

- Ban all movements of cattle from High Risk Areas and develop cattle vaccination programmes as a matter of urgency with ear tag linked pit-tag passport recognition and simple designated slaughter inspection system in High Risk Areas (Countries or regions as appropriate)

- Instigate monitoring of bTB background levels in selected wild animals using road kills and develop suitable livestock/wildlife management protocols for farm advisors. (All)

- Step up, with 5-year targets for real-time use, all vaccination and related research pilots and licensing tests. (All)

2 Badger management

- Stop immediately all BTB-related badger killing responses/programmes (Fr, RoI, UK)

- Implement badger vaccination schemes, as appropriate, as a replacement to culling and in association with bTB monitoring using a reliable vaccine supply (Fr, RoI, UK)

- Conduct new research into BTB/wildlife-cattle epidemiology and transmission on farmland. (UK, RoI, Fr)

- Coordinate road-kill testing schemes for a wide range of wild mammals to set and update a baseline for background bTB levels. (All)

3 Nature Conservation

- Evaluate locations where badger culling has taken place from 2010-2015, to investigate possible carnivore release effects upon European designated sites and species. (Fr, UK, RoI)

- Establish detailed standards and guidelines for assessment of Carnivore Release Effects caused by human interventions including badger killing. (All)

4 Animal Welfare

- Implement an immediate ban on the use of snares or wire restraints to catch badgers (Ire)

- Ban free-shooting at night as an authorised control method (All)
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<th>PRIORITY EUROBADGER REQUIREMENT FOR URGENT ADOPTION BY EU COUNTRY</th>
<th>UNITED KINGDON</th>
<th>REP. OF IRELAND</th>
<th>FRANCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Stop immediately all BTB-related badger culling programmes.</td>
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<td>2 Where applicable, reinstate whole-herd depopulation with immediate effect. Whole-herd depopulation should be implemented rigorously for chronic herds.</td>
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<td>3 Place immediate temporary ban on cattle movements out of existing High Risk Areas</td>
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<td>4 Raise the levels of tuberculin skin and gamma interferon testing on all cattle and cattle movements to 20th century eradication levels.</td>
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<td>5 Implement pre and post movement testing over adequate time periods for complete disease detection.</td>
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<td>6 Progress and promote with utmost urgency; development, testing and roll out of cattle vaccination programmes with pit-tag linked recognition and 'TB Free herd status' systems.</td>
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<td>7 Ban use of snares/wire restraints, use of dogs in setts and digging of badger setts via legal measures and statutes, as required</td>
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