

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Summary of Supplementary Badger Control 2017 and the Chief Veterinary Officer's advice on the outcome

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Background

In July 2017, Defra announced¹ that as part of the Government's 25-year strategy to eradicate bovine tuberculosis and protect the livelihoods of dairy and beef farmers, Natural England could license and authorised local farmers and landowners to carry out Supplementary Badger Control operations across two areas in Gloucestershire and Somerset.

Badger control licences were issued in the two areas in August and operations took place in each area, between 29 August 2017 and 15 January 2018. Cage-trapping and humane dispatch of trapped badgers by shooting ceased on 30 November 2017 and controlled shooting of badgers ceased on 15 January 2018 in both areas. This document sets out the outcomes of these operations in those areas.

Effectiveness

Estimates of the numbers of badgers to be removed from each badger control area were made for the purpose of giving advice to Natural England for the setting of minimum and maximum numbers. The estimates, methodologies and rationale used were published in September 2017.²

As in previous years, Natural England monitored the progress in each badger control area. The numbers of badgers removed were reported in all accessible land parcels on a regular basis. This provided Natural England with regular information on the quantity of badgers dispatched and spatial distribution of badger control activity. This enabled an assessment of the progress that each badger control company was making towards achieving the minimum and maximum numbers, and allowed Natural England to assess whether resources were being effectively deployed across accessible land.

The number of badgers removed against the minimum and maximum number is set out in Table 1 for each area.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bovine-tb-authorisation-for-badger-control-in-2017>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-to-natural-england-on-setting-minimum-and-maximum-numbers-of-badgers-to-be-controlled-in-2017>

Table 1. Total number of badgers removed per area

Area	Minimum Number	Maximum Number	Badgers Removed	Of which:	
				Removed by controlled shooting	Removed by cage trapping
Area 1 – Gloucestershire	160	580	172	143	29
Area 2 – Somerset	140	610	91	53	38

Safety of the operations

Operations in both areas were carried out to a high standard of public safety. In relation to the use of firearms in both areas, no incidents affecting public safety were reported.

Compliance monitoring

Natural England ensure compliance with the standards set out in the Best Practice Guidance for controlled shooting and cage trapping and dispatch of badgers through risk-based monitoring, assessing new contractors and training audits. All contractors in both areas had previously completed the required training and annual refresher training. There were no new contractors in either area.

Conclusions

The results from Area 1 in 2017 indicate that the company had delivered the level of supplementary badger control required to be confident of disease control benefits.

In Area 2, the minimum number was not achieved. A sett check was carried out in April/May 2018 of the setts examined in early 2014 (i.e. after the first year of intensive culling in autumn 2013), in order to get a better understanding of what was happening on the ground.

The results of the check showed a sharp drop in the active setts and active holes in active setts in the west zone, but no change in the east zone compared with the 2014 results. However, there was a drop in overall activity levels from 2014 to 2015 and 2016. The 2018 results are only slightly lower than the 2015 or 2016 survey results, which suggests that

the population is being maintained at the required level, despite Area 2 not achieving the minimum number.

The 2018 minimum and maximum numbers will be set in line with Defra's commitments under the Bern Convention. We will ensure that local extinction does not occur; not only to protect the UK's badger population but also to avoid adverse consequences on other protected species.

Chief Veterinary Officer's advice on the outcome of Supplementary Badger Control 2017

The aim of supplementary badger control is to preserve the disease control benefits which are expected from the completion of a four-year badger control operation. In order to achieve this, supplementary control needs to be effective in maintaining a reduced level of badger population.

The badger population reductions achieved in the two areas have been evaluated on the basis of the numbers and locations of badgers culled, the numbers culled against effort over time, and Natural England's independent assessments of the level and spatial distribution of culling effort deployed.

Based on the available information, the Chief Veterinary Officer's (CVO) advice is that a reduction in the badger population has been maintained in both areas and that an effective supplementary cull has taken place.



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