

FAILINGS OF THE RANDOMISED BADGER CULLING TRIALS

Our view that the RBCTs were fatally flawed by a poorly conceived and badly implemented methodology is based on the following facts.

- Poor culling efficiency.**

1 Commenting part way through the RBCTs Mr Bradshaw noted culling efficiency was as low as 30% in some triplets (1). And in the consultation document the final trapping efficiency was reported to be 20 to 60%. (2). Previous trials were carried out to far more exacting standards; virtually 100% clearance was effected by gassing in the Thornbury and Steeple Leaze Trials whilst the clearance at Hartland, using trapping, achieved well over 80% removal. In the two Irish trials over 80% removal of badgers was achieved.
- Inadequate number of days' trapping per year.**

2 Badgers were only trapped on average for 8 days per annum in the proactive triplets (3). This low level of trapping activity is wholly inadequate to remove sufficient badgers to reduce spread of infection to cattle. The DEFRA Wildlife Unit (WLU) customarily continued trapping for as long as necessary sometimes up to 3 months to ensure complete removal of all badgers on infected farms.
- Substantial areas of land unavailable for culling.**

3 In total 32% of land in the proactive areas was unavailable for culling with variations in different triplets from 18% to 57% (3). Thus substantial areas of land within culling triplets were left to support infected populations of badgers and provide a retreat for badgers dispersed by inefficient culling on adjacent land.
- Inconsistent farm participation.**

4 Consent status for culling inevitably altered as landowners withdrew permission to cull and new occupiers changed consents or prohibitions dictated by previous owners (3). Thus, the number of farms participating in particular triplets was variable, as was the time during which they were culled.
- Significant interference with trapping and poor trapping strategy**

5 The Independent Scientific Group naively posted the start time and place of the first trapping exercise on their website thus assisting the threatened animal activist interference. This interference persisted and by October 2003 had resulted in 8,981(57%) of 15,666 traps being interfered with and a further 1,827 (12%) being stolen (4). The ISG allowed trapping at setts to continue for 4 years (1998-2001) despite widespread interference, and it was only after Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001, following pleas from the WLU, that traps were laid away from setts on badger runs to avoid interference (5).
- Failure to clear badgers effectively**

6 The number of badgers killed in the Proactive Triplets was 8892 over 8 years. This figure is inevitably lower than it should have been due to the failure to achieve culling across all 10 triplets for 4 years. And once culling had started in all areas in 2002-03, the total number of badgers removed in

that year was 2057 and in each subsequent year well over half this number was again removed, demonstrating that these areas had never properly been cleared of badgers. (3).

7 **Inappropriate timing of culls**

Badgers show greatly reduced activity during late autumn and winter. Thus trapping is likely to be relatively ineffective during November to January (February-April is the closed season when culling is prohibited). However, in the RBCTs, 15 out of the first 30 culls (culling years 1 to 3) took place in November, December or January and 16 of the total of 51 culls (29%) were in these months despite WLU's advice to the contrary (3). As a result, some triplets went 2 years without an effective cull eg. Triplet B, North Devon (5).

8 **Unscientific abandonment of the Reactive Culling Triplets**

This occurred in 2003 when three triplets (D, I and J) had only completed one year's culling, and a further 4 triplets only completed 2 year's culling. This was regarded by many, including Professor Godfray in his independent review of the RBCTs (6), as a precipitate and unjustified decision, no doubt brought about by the sharp rise in disease in the reactive triplets attendant on the gross badger disturbance caused by poor culling methodology. The ISG should have understood the cause of the rise in cattle infections and could have rectified the situation had they listened more carefully to the WLU's advice and redoubled their efforts to cull more effectively (5).

9 **Temporary abandonment of the trials during 2001.**

The unavoidable suspension of tuberculin testing of cattle and control of badgers in seven of the 10 areas for a year during the FMD crisis completely disrupted the RBCTs for at least a year.

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References

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(2). DEFRA (2005) – Controlling the spread of bovine tuberculosis in cattle in high incidence areas in England: badger culling.

www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/badgers-tbcontrols/consultation.pdf

(3). Donnelly, C.A. and others (2006) Positive and negative effects of widespread badger culling on tuberculosis in cattle. *Nature* **439**, 843-846 (and Supplementary Information)

(4) Hansard, 8 December 2003, column 218 W

(5). EFRA Select Committee, 6th Report into bTB, 8 March 2006, ref BTB 33 Evidence from Paul Caruana, WLU, Truro.

(6) Godfray H.C.J. and others (2004) Independent Scientific Review of the Randomised Badger culling trials and associated epidemiological research