

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS****Bovine TB****19 January 2012**

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Caroline Spelman) In December I announced that the Government would allow controlled culling of badgers, carried out by groups of farmers and landowners, as part of a science-led and carefully managed policy of badger control to tackle TB in cattle. The policy would be piloted in two areas to test our assumptions about the effectiveness, humaneness and safety of controlled shooting.

I also announced that to select the pilot areas, I was inviting the farming industry to come forward with a shortlist of areas from which Defra would prioritise two to submit full applications for licences to control badgers.

I can now confirm that I have asked groups in two carefully selected areas, West Gloucestershire and West Somerset, to submit applications to Natural England.

Natural England will assess the applications against the strict licensing criteria and decide whether or not to grant licences. If either of the two areas fail to meet the licensing requirements, another area from the industry's shortlist will be invited to apply.

I understand that residents in these areas may have views on the proposal to cull badgers and, as part of its assessment, Natural England will provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the applications.

However, those undertaking licensed activity, and those living and working within the application area, must be protected. Therefore, we do not propose to make available any further information at this stage about the exact location of the pilot areas.

We expect Natural England's decision on whether or not to grant licences to these two areas to be made in the spring.

An independent panel of experts will oversee the monitoring and evaluation of the pilot areas and report back to Government.

Following conclusion of the first annual six-week cull in the pilot areas, from what we observe and what we learn, and taking into account the evaluation by the independent panel of experts, we will then take a decision on whether further licences should be granted.

Professor Christopher Wathes has been appointed chair of the independent panel of experts. Professor Wathes is a Professor of Animal Welfare at the Royal Veterinary College and the current chair of the Farm Animal Welfare Committee. Other members of the panel will be appointed shortly.

I know that there is great strength of feeling on badger culling, but I also know that we need to take action now before the situation deteriorates even further. We need to tackle all transmission routes of TB using all the available tools.