

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

BOVINE TB

Date: 5 November 2013

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Owen Paterson)

Successfully tackling bovine TB (bTB) in the badger population is a key element in our strategy to rid England of this disease within 25 years. It is this broad strategy, of which badger control is one component, that was endorsed by the House of Commons on 5th June by a majority of 61 votes.

The two badger control pilots, in Somerset and Gloucestershire, were designed to test that controlled shooting is a safe, humane and effective means of reducing badger numbers.

Today I am announcing to the House that the three week extension period in the Somerset control area concluded as planned on Friday 1st November. During this period, a further 90 badgers have been removed, giving an overall total of 940 for the first year of the four year cull. This represents a reduction of 65% in the estimated badger population before culling began. This will deliver clear disease benefits as part of a four year cull in the area.

Before the extension was licensed by Natural England, the advice of the Chief Veterinary Officer was that a further increase in the number of badgers culled after the initial six week period would improve the disease control benefits achieved even further and enable them to accrue earlier. With the further removal of badgers seen, the extension has been successful in meeting this aim.

While conclusions will need to await the findings of the Independent Panel of Experts, current indications also suggest that the pilot has been safe and humane.

I would like to pay tribute to the local farmers and landowners who have undertaken the cull, often in difficult terrain and weather, and often in the face of intimidation by a small minority who are determined to stop this disease control policy.

The eight week extension period in Gloucestershire began on 23rd October and I will make a further statement when operations there have concluded.

The Independent Panel of Experts will consider the information collected during the pilots on the safety, effectiveness and humaneness of controlled shooting. This will be made available to Parliament and the public after the culls have concluded and inform my decision on the wider roll-out of badger control in those parts of England most severely affected by this disease.

Achieving our aim of ridding England of bTB within 25 years will require long-term solutions and considerable national resolve. This Government is committed to tackling the disease in all reservoirs and by all available means.