

DERBYSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON POSSIBLE FUTURE MEASURES TO ACCELERATE BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS DISEASE ERADICATION IN ENGLAND

APRIL 21, 2021

The Government is calling for views on a Consultation paper on Bovine tuberculosis and possible future measures to accelerate disease eradication in England.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/bovine-tb-2020/bovine-tuberculosis-call-for-views-on-possible-fut/>

The Wildlife Trusts are very conscious of the hardship that bovine TB causes in the farming community and the need to find the right mechanisms to control the disease. We have maintained our view that a badger cull is not the answer and have been vaccinating badgers as a positive alternative for almost 10 years across England.

The evidence has always shown that badgers are not the primary cause of the spread of bovine TB in cattle: the primary route of infection is via cow-to-cow contact. These cattle based factors are being increasingly recognized as drivers of the disease, particularly cattle movements, poor bio-security on farms and slurry management.

We therefore welcome any proposed measures by the Government that focus efforts on controlling and decreasing bovine TB in cattle which is where the main problem lies. It is encouraging that this Consultation paper proposes a range of measures that if fully implemented could have a significant impact on the level of disease in cattle.

Our response is focussed on a number of key areas concerning cattle where we believe urgent action should be taken by the Government in order to achieve its goal of accelerating bovine TB eradication in England.

Cattle Movements and Risk Based Trading

The trading of cattle across England poses significant challenges to controlling the spread of bovine Tuberculosis (bTB). In 2016, there were approximately 5.5 million cattle on agricultural holdings in England and roughly 1.7 million cattle were moved within and between bovine TB risk areas <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/review-of-governments-bovine-tb-strategy-published>

All too often farmers are purchasing cattle with limited or no information on the bovine TB status of cattle bought. It is obvious that the ongoing and huge numbers of cattle movements that occur on a daily basis in England without detailed information on the status of bovine TB in cattle purchased will be an ongoing key factor in the spread of this disease. It is absolutely vital therefore that mechanisms are put in place as a matter of urgency so that this issue is addressed. Making such information available at the at the point of sale of cattle will be a significant step forward. We do have concerns that making such schemes voluntary as opposed to mandatory may not be as effective.

A report in 2020 **Trading with Risk: associating bovine Tuberculosis to cattle commodities in risk-based trading** <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17530350.2020.1824933>

showed the limitations of a voluntary approach in this area. Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCS) were introduced in 2016 for cattle commodities with bovine TB. What was concerning was that only 60 farmers adopted these Standards and no evidence was found that risk-based trading in cattle had improved.

As far back as 2013 a Government report on risk based trading recommended the introduction of a “comprehensive, accessible database as the ideal solution to support a successful risk-based trading scheme, which would be used by farmers, vets and auctioneers to inform purchasing decisions and post-purchase behaviour. The database should facilitate access to a range of TB risk factors such as movement history, testing history, background endemicity and also include an overall risk rating at the herd level. The Risk Based Trading Group stated in 2013 that if “a voluntary approach was not successful, a mandatory approach must be considered to ensure the success of risk-based trading.” It is time for decisive Government action in this area. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bovine-tb-risk-based-trading-empowering-farmers-to-manage-tb-trading-risks>

We believe that isolating cattle recently purchased by farmers pending the results of a post movement test is vital and restricting movements to herds of lower bovine TB status is also of the utmost importance. In addition restricting movements of cattle between defined zones or risk areas as proposed in the Consultation is another very important measure that needs to be adopted. It is not surprising that bovine TB has been extremely difficult to control and eliminate while cattle in High Risk Areas (HRA) continue to be traded through extensive and widespread cattle movements across England. Failure to act in this area will inevitably lead to further spread of the disease exposing Edge Areas and Low Risk Areas (LRA) to the ongoing spread of bovine TB.

Bio- Security

The 2019 DEFRA Farming Practices Survey clearly shows the scale of the problem regarding lack of adequate bio-security with large numbers of farms not implementing basic biosecurity measures and many farms in the Survey saying they would only implement such measures if grants were available. This needs to be urgently addressed by both farmers and the Government. It is totally unacceptable to continue with a policy of culling badgers when basic measures to significantly improve biosecurity on farms across England are simply not being adopted by farmers. The Government needs to urgently make it clear to farmers what bio-security standards are expected across farms and monitor and if necessary enforce such standards.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831119/Cattle Farm practices survey A](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831119/Cattle_Farm_practices_survey_A)

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