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## NFU Summary - Bovine TB: Consultation on proposals to evolve badger control policy and introduce additional cattle measures: 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023

***The NFU welcome the recognition of the farming community's dedication and collective efforts that have led to the positive outcomes achieved to date through industry-led culling. This consultation marks a significant milestone in shaping the future of the bTB eradication strategy and we are pleased to offer the opportunity for members to provide input.***

### Consultation Summary

Defra is seeking views on adding Targeted Badger Intervention (TBI) to the Government's bovine TB (bTB) Eradication Strategy, building on previous commitments made in 2021 to retain culling where required. Recent studies show a 56% reduction in TB incidence in herds after four years of culling. TBI aligns with the adaptive TB policy deployed in England's Low-Risk Areas, aiming to maintain successful wildlife control to combat disease spread where supported by epidemiological evidence.

Defra also proposes additional measures to support responsible cattle movements and purchasing as a key component of their holistic disease prevention strategy.

### Wildlife Disease Control

#### **Proposal 1 – Introducing a Targeted Badger Intervention (TBI) policy.**

Defra is proposing to introduce a TBI policy to focus interventions (including culling and vaccinating) where badgers are part of the local disease problem. Focus will be in the High Risk Areas (HRA) and Edge Areas where there are elevated levels of infection in cattle. These areas would be known as 'clusters'.

To identify these clusters, The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) will use spatial analysis methods to find areas with high incidences of bTB in cattle, and where badgers have been identified as part of the disease spread problem. The use of Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) will also play an important role alongside this methodology.

Once these clusters have been identified, local engagement would take place to help characterise the 'disease picture' and find the best solution to halt and reverse the spread of bTB.

Access to culling would be subject to the recommendation of the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) and the Secretary of State to determine which clusters would be eligible. Any recommendation made will also consider:

- Any previous culling operations
- The distribution of cattle bTB incidence
- The spatial distribution of badger bTB prevalence

For areas that do not meet the required criteria, but deem to be a cause for concern, (especially in the Edge area) further discussions will be had by the CVO to consider those clusters.

Once culling had begun, APHA would then test a sample of culled animals to advise if this method should either continue for another year, or if the cluster should be expanded based upon the current

spatial distribution of disease. If an area shows significant improvements in the disease situation, the use of badger vaccination will be deployed as a non-lethal exit strategy.

Although there is no set timeframe for this, data from the Low-Risk Areas suggest at least two years of culling would be needed.

It is proposed there would be no limits on how many clusters can be licenced in any given year. For those areas that do not fall into the cluster, or where culling is not deemed necessary, further support will be provided in the form of on farm biosecurity and the vaccination of badgers.

### **Proposal 2 – Licence and associated conditions for badger culling under a targeted badger intervention policy**

The Secretary of State would act as the licencing authority for TBI, transferring the responsibility from Natural England to Defra. To reduce the administrative burden on farming groups, the ability to deliver culling and vaccination as a single organisational annual licence is being considered.

When applying for a licence, the licence holder will need to show their capacity to vaccinate badgers. This should be done immediately after the CVO has advised that culling should cease within the cluster.

Gaining views from both past and current cull companies, particularly in relation to the use of organisational licences and funding, will be instrumental in this proposal as these companies have an in-depth understanding of the process. As with the requirement to demonstrate capacity for badger vaccinations, this needs to be reflective of what those on the ground feel is achievable.

### **Cattle Measures**

Defra has introduced two main proposals to encourage responsible cattle movements and purchasing, forming part of a comprehensive approach to align cattle and wildlife control measures.

### **Proposal 3 – Supporting cattle purchases by publishing further bTB risk information on ibTB**

IbTB is an online mapping tool aimed to help cattle farmers minimise the risks associated with purchasing cattle, by providing detailed insights into the bovine TB situation in certain areas. To enhance decision-making for livestock keepers, Defra propose expanding the information available on ibTB beyond the current herd level TB risk score. This expansion would include more comprehensive data at both the individual animal and herd levels, aiming to provide a more detailed overview for informed purchasing of new stock to aid disease control.

- Date and type of the animal's most recent pre-movement TB test.
- Date and type of the most recent TB test completed in the herd of origin of that animal.
- Number of years in the herd of origin.
- The number of years the herd of origin has been bTB free.

### **Proposal 4 – Supporting responsible cattle movements by publishing bTB risk information of 'supplier' herds on ibTB.**

The proposal aligns with the TB Partnership recommendations, advocating for the disclosure of certain bTB information regarding the source herds of new livestock i.e. the location along with the duration of TB-free status. Cattle restocking practices such as sourcing cattle from higher risk herds can serve as another indicator of bTB risk with herds sourcing stock from higher risk herds increasing their own bTB risk. This measure aims to enhance transparency and accountability within the livestock trade while aiding in the prevention and management of bTB outbreaks.

### Key Questions

Defra is inviting views on how the licensing proposal can be made as effective as possible. The relevant questions within the consultation are:

**Q5.** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the stated objective of a targeted badger intervention policy?

**Q6.** Do you agree with the requirement that badger culling under the proposed targeted badger intervention policy be allowed in clusters of cattle infection with high herd incidence, after removing cattle movement related breakdowns?

**Q7.** Should there be an annual cap on the number of clusters that can be licensed to undertake badger culling?

**Q8.** What other factors should be taken into consideration in defining a cluster under the targeted badger intervention policy? (optional)

**Q10.** To what extent do you agree or disagree there should be a separation of Natural England's statutory conservation advice from licensing decisions?

**Q11.** Do you agree that the Secretary of State should assume the role of licensing authority for culling under a targeted badger intervention policy?

**Q13.** Do you have any comments on the Information for Applicants at Annex B for carrying out the culling part of a targeted badger intervention policy?

**Q14.** Do you have any other comments on the proposals for a targeted badger intervention policy?

**Q15.** Should animal level bTB risk information be published on ibTB?

**Q17.** To what extent do you agree or disagree it would be helpful to share information on where herd owners source their stock from?

**Please Note** – This is a summary of the full Defra consultation. The full details of the consultation including annexed items and the full proposals are available here:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/bovine-tb/bovine-tb-consultation-wildlife-cattle/>

This consultation applies to England only and will run for five weeks closing on the **22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024**.

During this consultation period, the NFU want to hear from our members so that we can represent views thoroughly in our response.