



MEMBER'S BRIEFING

TB Update Oct 24th 2012

The announcement made this week by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Owen Patterson, on the last minute postponement of the Pilot Badger Cull has frustrated the entire industry. While in support of the painstaking decision by the companies undertaking the culls to postpone the cull in the name of improved management, NBA is disturbed at the eleventh hour changes to population statistics, which has caused the postponement.

The rigid conditions under which the cull was to take place were met by the two companies involved in the cull by end of last week, and the letters confirming this were ready to be released by Natural England.

The license conditions included that the company had to cull the minimum number of badgers specified on the license (i.e. 70% of the estimated population). If this was not reached in the first 42 days a breach of the license would be invoked entitling DEFRA to take over the cull with their own contractors at the (unquantifiable) expense of the project.

Incredibly, only last week the Food, Environment and Research Agency (FERA) who had been commissioned by DEFRA to assess numbers almost doubled the population estimates for West Somerset and Gloucestershire originally estimated by NE. This meant that the target 70% was unachievable in the 42 day proposal and would have resulted in Defra interception, which is unacceptable.

The two companies tried to negotiate with DEFRA to no avail. As a result they refused to enter into an agreement that they knew they could not deliver, particularly given the time of year and conditions, knowing it would have been totally irresponsible to do so. The cage trapping season closes on 1st December, and both dense fog and cold weather has been forecast which would have caused further delays and put animals to ground. Adequate contractors had been trained and prepared for the original numbers proposed, but these were no where near enough to cull the suggested increased number. NFU supported and strongly defended this decision.

The entire reason behind the pilot and the creation of the two companies was commitment to eradicating bTB and their first-hand experience of how a successful cull can reduce TB in cattle meant they were not willing to allow the pilot programme to go wrong. There was compulsion from government and DEFRA to go ahead but a failure of a pilot project will naturally lead to a failure for the future roll-out of methods.

NBA fully support this decision which was a responsible decision to make for the whole industry in dealing with the disease for the future. Challenges remain ahead but success of a pilot is paramount in order to give evidence for wider application and must be based on sound and robust results.

The companies and their contractors are highly dedicated and NBA are now in support of their continued on-the-ground approach to assist independent assessments to determine the true badger population and ensure resources and backing is in place for 2013. While this will come at a cost, this will be a small price if success prevails.
