

## REPORTS AND COMMENTS

### **The Krebs report on TB in badgers and cattle and the Government's response**

In December 1997, Professor John Krebs and the other members of the Independent Scientific Review Group produced their report to the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Foods on bovine tuberculosis in cattle and badgers. The 4-page Executive Summary is separately available. The Group found that the balance of evidence strongly supports the view that, in Britain, badgers are a significant source of infection to cattle. A variety of policies for killing badgers to control the disease in cattle have been implemented by MAFF over the years but, the Group concluded, it is not possible to compare the effectiveness of these policies or the impact of not killing badgers, 'because there have been no proper experiments'. The report recommends that MAFF should set up an experiment (overseen and analysed by an independent expert group) to quantify and compare the impact of culling badgers under three treatments: proactive culling of badgers, reactive culling following identification of TB in cattle, and no culling. It recommends that the experiment is carried out in at least 30 high-risk 10km squares. In its response to the report, The Government has indicated that it is favourably disposed to this recommendation - subject to more detailed examination of the public expenditure, legal and practical implications of this form of trial.

The Group recommends (and the Government has accepted) that no other culling should be carried out. It also suggests that the farming industry should take the lead, with advice from MAFF, in carrying out a proper experimental comparison of the impact of a small number of simple husbandry measures on the incidence of TB in cattle. The Government has indicated that it will pursue discussions with the farming industry about this.

In the long run, development of a vaccine is seen by the Review Group as the best prospect for control of bovine TB in cattle, while badger vaccination might also play a role in the future. There is a clear need for further research on this problem and the report recommends that MAFF should ensure it commissions suitable studies from the best groups in the research community.

The report estimates that the annual kill during the proposed experiment to quantify the impact of killing badgers on bovine TB is unlikely to differ substantially from the number of badgers killed annually under the present interim policy (and will number significantly less than those killed on roads). Contrasting with the situation under the interim policy, lactating sows will be culled during the proposed experiment. The Government recognizes the welfare consequences of this decision but agrees that not culling such badgers would reduce the experiment's power. Accordingly, it proposes culling, as far as possible, at times of the year when there are minimal numbers of lactating badgers.

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*Bovine Tuberculosis in Cattle and Badgers*. Report to MAFF by Professor John R Krebs and the Independent Scientific Review Committee (1997). Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: London. 191pp. Paperback. Obtainable from MAFF Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX (Pub No PB 3423). Price £35.00.

*The Government's Response to the Krebs Report on Bovine Tuberculosis in Cattle and Badgers*. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. (1997). Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: London. 8pp. Paperback. Obtainable from MAFF Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX (Pub No PB 3451). Free.