**Information from badger Trust on the recent Government Consultation on bTB & the Cull.**

The Badger Trust calls for all badger lovers to be a voice for badgers and formally respond to the Government’s consultation on future plans for its bTB policy.

You may be aware of the Defra Bovine TB consultation on proposals to eradicate bovine TB in cattle in England, further to the response to the Godfray review of bTB policy. Badger Trust has carefully reviewed the consultation documentation and spoken to other organisations prior to producing our response.

The consultation covers a number of important proposals, which would:

* introduce mandatory post-movement testing of cattle moving from higher bTB risk regions (the HRA, Edge Areas on six-monthly surveillance testing and Wales) into Edge Areas where herds are on annual surveillance testing
* use the more sensitive IFN-γ test in the HRA and Edge Areas, albeit where specific criteria are met
* cease to issue new intensive cull licences after 2022
* give the Chief Veterinary Officer the power to revoke new licences after two years of culling, following a ‘progress evaluation’
* reduce the initial financial commitment required from cull companies

restrict Supplementary (SBC) licences to a maximum of two years (from five years), and to prohibit issuing SBC licences for previously licensed areas or areas licensed for Badger Disease Control after 2020

Badger Trust will do all it can to support the positives in these proposals, but we are clear that they do not go far enough. Please join us in responding to this consultation and sharing it with your followers and supporters, encouraging them to speak up for badgers too.

We have produced our response to this consultation. Here are the important points:

Whilst Badger Trust welcomes any suggestion of a reduction in badger cullings, this proposed strategy represents a continuation and expansion of culling. We estimate that the total kill figure since the start of the current cull in 2013 may reach around 280,000, from its current position of almost 141,000. This means the Government is only halfway through killing badgers and represents nearly 60% of a total estimated badger population of 485,000.

Badger Trust would like to see an immediate end to the issuing of badger control licences. Additionally, an increased focus (both financially and operationally) must be placed on cattle testing to address the primary cause of bTB outbreaks.

Badger Trust supports any improvement in cattle testing to help eradicate bTB. However, using a more sensitive test (IFNy) is vital, given that the SICCT test alone can leave between 20% and 50% of diseased animals undetected within herds. A number of further improvements can be made and we call for an increase in spending on testing, rather than an attempt to spread resources.

Badger Trust is concerned that the proposed vaccination operations are ‘pilots’ with limited roll-out, which will be evaluated by the Chief Vet. There is no indication of how a full roll-out could or would be achieved.

Badger Trust is concerned that vaccination by cull companies will only be encouraged where intensive culling – and in most cases an additional two years of supplementary culling – has been carried out. This leaves little obvious motivation for them to vaccinate rather than cull.

Although Badger Trust is responding in full to the consultation, we urge you to respond as an individual too; individual responses carry much greater weight. By submitting a response you can help us speak up for badgers