



Registered charity no. 1186850

Oxfordshire Badger Group



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Re: Badger Cull could come to Oxfordshire this summer despite OBG's vaccination scheme

06/08/20

Dear Robert Courts MP,

I am writing to you as Chair of the Oxfordshire Badger Group, regarding the Government's policy of culling badgers to reduce bTB and the concern that our members and we believe the majority of your constituents have about the cull being licensed in Oxfordshire in the coming months.

Oxfordshire Badger Group, which recently gained charitable status, is in its second year of a vaccination programme working with farmers, BBOWT, The Badger Trust and other badger groups. We have more and more landowners signing up to join the scheme and have just finished the first and second phase of our vaccination for this year and are about to start the third phase. All this has been possible because of a dedicated group of trained volunteers and supporters who have contributed to our gofundme appeal, as we have had no financial aid from DEFRA.

Despite our established and expanding vaccination programme and the fact that Oxfordshire is a low risk area for bovine TB, it looks very likely that the badger cull will be licensed in some areas of Oxfordshire within the next month or so. This will undermine our vaccination scheme and flies in the face of the recommendations of the Godfray Report (2018) which the Government commissioned. The report concluded that, "it is wrong to over-emphasise the role of wildlife" and that, "moving from lethal to non-lethal controls of the disease in badgers is highly desirable". In March the Government suggested that it would phase our badger culling but the 'next steps' guidance suggests it will be accelerated.

The science makes clear that culling is not an effective strategy to combat bTB. 80% of badgers do not carry TB and so £50 million of taxpayers is funding the indiscriminate mass slaughter of mostly healthy badgers. Bovine TB is a cattle disease and most of the outbreaks come from cattle to cattle transmission. Badgers are being used as scapegoats for the failings in tackling this cattle disease. Badger vaccination schemes are in place all over the country and the Government could fund and extend these programme, thus ensuring that the badger population is healthy. Vaccination should be at the heart of any strategy which it is clearly not. More robust cattle based measures are needed and would be more effective and a better use of public money: more accurate and frequent cattle testing, tighter control on cattle movements, ramped up farm biosecurity and vaccination for cattle.

The Government announced an exit strategy in March to phase out badger culling and replace it with vaccination, but this needs to be implemented now, not in 5 years' time as suggested. The trust of the British public, the majority of whom are opposed to badger culling, has been betrayed, as rather than coming to an end, the slaughter of our an iconic and much loved' protected' species is set to continue at an even greater pace, even during this pandemic. At a time when public faith in those making decisions is under strain, the fact that another 30,000 could be killed in the next few months to add to the 100,000 already killed since 2013, will erode confidence even further in our politicians. Many badgers will die in agony and whole badger clans will be wiped out, leading to local extinction in the largest slaughter of a 'protected' species ever. 70% are killed by controlled shooting, a method which has been rejected on welfare grounds by the Government's own Independent panel and the British Veterinary Association.

In the last few difficult months people have gained solace from the countryside in Oxfordshire and the wildlife we share it with and will be shocked by the indiscriminate shooting of badgers which could take place in the next months. We live in the most nature depleted country and recent news is that 1 in 4 mammals is threatened with extinction. Badgers could join this list if the indiscriminate massacre of this 'protected' wildlife species continues. It is time now for the killing to stop and be replaced by non-lethal methods.

The recent DEFRA consultation on licensing no cull buffers around land where badgers are vaccinated has, disappointingly, been formulated to allow culling around vaccinated land. The Government, instead of spending millions of pounds killing mostly healthy badgers, could fund and support the excellent efforts of local volunteers and groups to vaccinate badgers all over the country, including Oxfordshire. It seems, however, set to continue the unprecedented slaughter of badgers, with no mechanism to end it.

We have written to all Oxfordshire's District Councillors to ask them to support badger vaccination rather than culling in Oxfordshire and we would like your personal support for what we are doing and help, to ensure that our vaccination programme is not undermined by the licensing of a badger cull in Oxfordshire. Vaccination and cattle based measures provide a more effective, humane and cheaper way alternative to badger culling which is better for farmers, the taxpayer and our precious wildlife and we hope that you will support it before thousands more badgers are needlessly killed.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Julia Hammett

Chair, Oxfordshire Badger Group