

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

July 2011

Annex D:

Natural England's draft guidance to applicants on completion of a Badger Control Plan

Please Note: This is a working draft of guidance, which will be revised and will form part of Natural England's Guidance to Applicants if a policy of badger control is adopted. This is not intended to be a standalone document.

Purpose of the Badger Control Plan

Natural England is the licensing authority in England for the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and determines licence applications for the purpose of preventing the spread of disease on behalf of the Secretary of State. Before issuing a licence, Natural England has to be satisfied that there is a genuine problem to resolve, there are no satisfactory alternatives, the action proposed is proportionate and that the licensed action will not be detrimental to the survival of the badger population concerned or adversely affect the conservation status of any other species or habitat. However, there also needs to be a clear expectation that the action licensed will be effective in achieving its purpose – in this case, reducing the risk of bovine TB transmission from badgers to cattle. Applicants must submit a completed Badger Control Plan with their licence application in order to help Natural England determine if their proposals are likely to achieve an effective cull in accordance with the licensing criteria.

The commitment of those involved in a licence to follow a Badger Control Plan for the required period, normally at least 4 years, will be secured through a TB Management Agreement (made under section 7 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006). The details set out in the Badger Control Plan should provide evidence that the licence applicant has realistic and feasible proposals for achieving the necessary cull level and implementing biosecurity measures. If a licence is issued, it will be on the basis that these proposals, subject to any modifications required by Natural England, are implemented. Failure to do so, once a licence has been issued, may result in amendment or revocation of the licence, or in enforcement action being taken.

Scope of the Badger Control Plan

The details of the Badger Control Plan should be completed electronically on the spreadsheet provided by Natural England or, for smaller numbers of participants if that is not possible, as a hard copy on a print-out of the spreadsheet. Principally, this deals with elements of biosecurity relevant to potential disease spread from badgers to cattle (and vice versa) and proposals for the effective delivery of the cull and/or vaccination programme.

The main areas that are covered are:

1. **Biosecurity:** Each participating farmer in the control area must have had awareness training on biosecurity, normally through guidance and completion of a biosecurity self-assessment, or by provision of specific on-farm advice, and any biosecurity issues raised should be addressed.
2. **Effective implementation of the licence:** The plan should show how those carrying out the action, whether culling and/or vaccination, will be deployed and the methods they will use, and should record the evidence relevant to the operators' competence. Proposals for the first and for subsequent years are set out on separate pages of the spreadsheet.
3. **Non-participating Farms:** Non-participating farms with vulnerable livestock in the licence area and around the boundary should be listed and details given of what biosecurity

and/or mitigation measures will be taken to reduce their risks. Farms inside the control area and around the boundary are dealt with on separate pages in the spreadsheet.

The following paragraphs give further guidance on what needs to be considered when completing each of these sections.

Biosecurity:

Reducing badger-cattle contact through improved biosecurity measures is likely to contribute to reducing badger-related bovine TB in cattle, so such reasonable measures should be implemented. (For this purpose “reasonable measures” means measures that in the particular circumstances are practicable, proportionate and appropriate). Used alongside licensed action, this will maximise the likelihood of a beneficial impact on disease incidence during the licence period and subsequently.

As part of the licence application you will have been asked to provide details of biosecurity training and advice that has been provided for farmers in the application area. Participating farmers/landowners must have carried out a disease-risk self-assessment questionnaire to help identify areas for improvement (see Annex E to the consultation).

In the Badger Control Plan you should highlight any areas for improvement identified in the biosecurity training or risk assessments, and describe what steps are being taken to improve biosecurity where it is practical, proportionate and appropriate to do so.

Some biosecurity measures can be implemented at little or no cost and should normally be adopted, on a precautionary basis, wherever possible. Biosecurity is one of the issues that will be looked at in licence compliance visits. See further biosecurity guidance for more details (see Annex E to the consultation).

Effective implementation of the Licence:

For badger culling to have a beneficial effect it needs to be carried out over all of the participating land in the Control Area within a short period of time, not more than 6 weeks, and it must achieve a substantial reduction in the local badger population, expected to equate to 70% or more of the population. There should also be reasonable measures in place to mitigate the risk to non-participating farmers and landowners both within the Control Area and in the 2km ring surrounding the culled area. Culling must be repeated each year for at least four years.

To ensure that action taken under licence will meet these requirements, and help reduce the risk of cattle TB breakdowns, the Badger Control Plan should set out how it is proposed to carry out the work in an effective way. Where culling is being undertaken by a contractor, they will probably be best placed to provide this information.

Points that need to be covered are set out below:

Culling:

- What methods will be used and what training/evidence of competence in those methods do the operators have?
- What areas will each operator be covering?
- How many 'main' setts are there in these areas?
- If trapping, how many traps will operators be using?
- If shooting, how frequently are shooters committed to going out, and at what times?
- How will you deploy trappers/shooters to achieve the level of cull needed throughout the licence area and within a short period of time? – each year's cull across the entire licence area must be achieved within 6 weeks – how will you achieve this?;
- Who will collate information on culling to feed into licence returns (a suggested pro-forma for operators to record information in the field is given in the Appendix)?

Carcase disposal:

- What arrangements have you made for disposal of the badgers culled under licence?

Vaccination:

To have a beneficial effect a sufficiently large proportion of the badger population needs to be injected to prevent continued circulation of the disease within the population. In addition it must be carried out competently and humanely and needs to be repeated each year for at least four years.

Since, as with culling, effective disease control also requires that measures are taken to deal with other risk factors, you should take appropriate steps to reduce badger-cattle contact at high-risk points, as outlined above.

In addition to the information needed for trapping and culling, for vaccination you will also need to consider:

- Name and address of Vet prescribing the vaccine.
- Name and address of Vet responsible for veterinary advice and guidance in the field (may or may not be the same as the prescribing Vet).
- How many trained lay vaccinators will be available to carry out the operation (copies of Certificates of Competence to be submitted with application)?
- How big an area or how many setts do you intend to treat?
- How long do you propose the trapping operation to continue?
- How are you going to mark vaccinated animals to ensure they are not vaccinated a second time within the same trapping season?
- How will you decide when you have treated enough animals? (The aim should be to treat as many animals as you can catch – in practice this is likely to still leave a proportion of the population untreated);
- What provisions do you have for humane despatch of injured animals that may be trapped?

- What commitment do you have from those involved in the operation for undertaking follow-up treatments in successive years?

Non-participating Farms:

Evidence suggests that disruption of the badger's stable social organisation can result in badgers ranging more widely, increased incidence of disease in the badger population, and an increased risk of TB herd breakdowns in farms adjoining cull areas, particularly in the early years of a cull – this has been termed the 'perturbation' effect.

Participants must put in place reasonable measures to mitigate the risk to non-participating farmers and landowners of a potential increase in new confirmed incidents of TB in vulnerable livestock within the culled area and in the 2km ring surrounding the culled area; and to protect the interests of any non-farming interests that may be affected by badger control. For this purpose "reasonable measures" means measures that in the particular circumstances are practical, proportionate and appropriate. Reasonable measures to reduce this risk, which might include provision of fencing, vaccination of badgers, or specific on-farm biosecurity advice, should be taken (See Guidance on protection for non-participants).

The Badger Control Plan should provide details of non-participating farms that may be affected, the information or help that has been provided to improve their awareness of the risks and guidance they have been given on measures that can be taken to reduce them. Where specific issues have been identified, details should be given of what steps have been, or will be taken to mitigate the risks.

Note on the 'conservation safeguard':

The Government is required to ensure that licensed action is not detrimental to the survival of the badger population concerned. Licence conditions will include provisions aimed at preventing local extinction and, on a broad scale, this is one of the elements that will be monitored by Defra. However, individual licensees should also be aware of these obligations and should have checks in place as an 'early warning' system to prevent the risk of breaching this requirement on a local scale. The proposals set out in the Badger Control Plan should take account of this and should not be aimed at completely eradicating badgers in the control area. If, at any time during the licensed operations, it appears that the local badger population has been reduced to such an extent that it is in danger of local extinction, culling must stop and you must notify Natural England. We will determine if further culling can be allowed and will assess whether any change is required to your licence.

In the course of the overall operation, if this involves culling, simple sett monitoring should be undertaken to determine if badgers are still present in the cull area. This should be carried out each year during the course of the licence, in any case, as part of the assessment of past culling efforts and planning for the coming year's culling activity.

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