

24<sup>th</sup> March 2015

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about controlling the spread of bovine TB.

No decision has been taken on the start dates for culling in 2015. The current four-year licences for the two existing cull areas allow culling of badgers from 1<sup>st</sup> June onwards. It is for the cull companies to decide when they wish to start. Natural England, as the licensing authority, will consider proposed start dates and, providing it is satisfied that all the necessary conditions have been met, will issue an authorisation that allows cull companies to proceed for a 6-week period.

Bovine TB is a serious disease with greater incidence in England than all the other EU member states combined. It increased nine-fold between 1997 and 2010 and caused 26,602 cattle to be slaughtered in 2013 alone. The Government remains committed to using all available means to address it and is pursuing a comprehensive strategy for England to become free of TB by 2038. This involves a wide range of tools and three key components.

The new Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme is supporting badger vaccination projects in parts of the country that border the high-risk areas of the south west and west midlands. Vaccinating healthy badgers in these areas should create a buffer zone to help prevent spread to new areas where the current incidence is low.

Cattle movement controls and testing are being strengthened to stop infection spreading between herds, and herd owners are being encouraged to improve their own biosecurity. The regime is also being strengthened for tackling the disease in non-bovine farmed species, such as alpacas.

As lessons have shown from countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Ireland, where there is a reservoir of disease in wildlife this does need to be tackled through culling. Leading vets have supported this approach and improvements are being made following the first trial year based on recommendations from the Independent Expert Panel. Operators underwent increased training to improve humaneness and effectiveness, and an independent audit is taking place.

Bovine TB is a terrible disease which is devastating our cattle and dairy industries and causing misery in rural communities. We need to do everything we can to make England free of TB.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



**Alok Sharma MP**