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Open letter to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs calling for badger cull moratorium

Sirs,

We the undersigned are writing to express our concerns regarding the ongoing licensed culling of badgers in England as part of the government's strategy for controlling bovine tuberculosis (bTB) in cattle.

Since culling began in two 'pilot zones' in 2013, some 177,000 badgers, a legally protected species in the UK, have been killed under licence across parts of England. In 2021, culling licences covered approximately 75% of the High-Risk Area for bTB, constituting an estimated 27,000km² across the west and south-west of England.

When the government of the time first announced its intentions to introduce licensed badger culling in 2010, it promised "*a carefully managed and science-led policy of badger control in areas with high and persistent levels of bovine tuberculosis.*" Throughout the roll-out of the badger culling policy, the government and its advisors have insisted that badger culling is working, and that it is a necessary 'tool in the box' for controlling bTB.

However, the only measure of whether badger culling is 'working' is whether it is resulting in a substantial and predictable reduction in bTB in cattle. To date the government has provided little evidence for any such impact. In addition, very few culled badgers have been tested for the presence of bTB making it impossible to verify whether levels of bTB are 'high and persistent' within targeted badger populations.

In March of this year a peer-reviewed independent scientific paper by Langton and others was published in the respected journal *Veterinary Record*, analysing government data on the incidence and prevalence of bTB in cattle herds within the High-Risk Area for the period 2010-2020. The authors concluded that badger culling has had no significant impact on bTB among cattle herds. In response, DEFRA published its own non-peer-reviewed analysis in the form of a graph, which it subsequently admitted was based on 'incorrect calculations'. Its corrected graph, published in the same journal in May, appeared to show no significant effect of badger culling on cattle herd incidence, corroborating the findings of the independent scientific paper.

Moreover, more than 70% of the badgers culled to date have been killed by so-called 'controlled shooting' – the targeting free-roaming badgers at night with rifles – a method

deemed inhumane by the government's own Independent Expert Panel and the British Veterinary Association.

In spite of this the government has issued licences for supplementary culls, which came into force on 1st June and which could result in the targeting of an additional 25,000 badgers this summer. Further culling licences are expected to be issued in September.

As we enter the 10th consecutive year of licenced badger culling without any conclusive evidence for its efficacy in controlling disease and unresolved humaneness concerns, we urge you to place an immediate moratorium on any further culling licences, pending a thorough independent and transparent review of the policy.

Sincerely,

Tom Langton BSc (Hons), M.IENE, C. Biol, FRSB. Head of Secretariat, Eurobadger

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Peter Hambly, Executive Director, Badger Trust

Will Travers OBE, co-founder and Executive President, Born Free Foundation

Virginia McKenna OBE, co-founder and Trustee, Born Free Foundation

Adam Grogan, Head of Wild Animal Science and Policy, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Claire Bass, Executive Director, Humane Society International UK

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