

## [Committee publishes its report on Welsh Government's new proposals for tackling Bovine TB in Wales](#)

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This article was originally published on 23 March 2017. It is being reposted ahead of the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs' statement on 20 June 2017.

### What is Bovine TB and what is the disease picture in Wales?

Bovine TB (bovine tuberculosis) is an infectious and chronic disease caused by *Mycobacterium bovis* (M. bovis) and usually affects the lungs and lymph nodes of cattle. The [latest figures for Wales](#) show that in the 12 months to end January 2017, 10,002 cattle were slaughtered (this includes cattle with the disease and those exposed to M.bovis).

Longer-term trends show that since a peak in new herd incidences in 2008–9, there has been a general downward trend. Whilst the number of cattle being slaughtered declined post-2009, it has been increasing since 2013. The [Welsh Government attributes](#) this rise to the increased use of the gamma-interferon blood test (one of the two main tests). According to the Welsh Government's [Quarter 4 2016 statistics](#) the lowest levels of TB are in north west Wales and the highest in south west Wales.

### What is the Welsh Government doing to tackle the disease?

The Welsh Government has to date adopted a [Bovine TB Eradication Programme](#) made up of a number of elements, including cattle measures and wildlife controls. The long-term goal is to eradicate bovine TB from Wales.

[The Badger \(Control Order\) \(Wales\) 2011](#) gave the Welsh Government powers to undertake, if it wished, a badger cull within



the [Intensive Action Area](#) (IAA) in Pembrokeshire. This order was [revoked in 2012, following a decision to pursue a policy of badger vaccination](#). A five-year vaccination pilot commenced in 2012 in the IAA. Due to problems with the global supply of the vaccine used to inoculate badgers, the pilot was suspended a year early.

In October 2016 the Welsh Government launched a [consultation](#) ‘A Refreshed TB Eradication Strategy’ (this closed on 10 January 2017). A key change in approach is the introduction of regionalised approach based on TB incidence. This sees Wales split into three TB regions –high, intermediate and low.

The consultation presented a range of proposals. These included: surveillance testing of cattle herds; pre-movement testing; movement restrictions on infected herds; strengthened biosecurity on farms; risk-based trading; slaughtering infected animals; badger vaccination and, under certain circumstances, the removal of infected badgers to break the badger to cattle transmission route. The consultation advised that each of three TB areas will see different measures used in a targeted approach.

### Why has the Committee looked at this?

Due to bovine TB having a significant impact on animal welfare, farmer welfare and businesses, it is a priority for the Assembly’s Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee. Following the publication of the Welsh Government’s [consultation](#), the Committee undertook an inquiry to consider the future direction of this policy.

To understand the scientific evidence and the wider policy issues, the Committee heard from a range of stakeholders, including industry, those representing wildlife conservation, academics, Lesley Griffiths Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, the Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales and an adviser to Defra. A committee delegation also visited Ireland to meet the Irish Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Ireland’s Chief Veterinary Officer.

The Committee has now published its [report](#); Report on the Welsh Government’s Refreshed TB Eradication programme, which sets out recommendations to the Welsh Government based on the evidence gathered.



## What does the Committee's report say?

The report is divided into a number of sections. The first presents the Committee's findings relating to practices in other countries. The other sections set out the Committee's views and recommendations on key aspects of the Welsh Government's proposals, including cattle-to-cattle transmission and transmission through wildlife. The Committee considers the report to be an important contribution to informing the future direction of Welsh Government's policy on bovine TB.

The report states that in light of the evidence heard, the Committee endorses the Welsh Government's proposed refreshed approach. They consider it to be comprehensive in looking at all aspects of disease transmission, set within a new regionalised framework, supported by a wide range of measures. Due to the devastating impact the disease has on rural communities and the agricultural sector in Wales, the Committee recommend that a national target date is set for Wales to be TB-free, and for interim targets for the three TB regions.

In supporting the Welsh Government's proposal to trap, test and remove infected badgers in localised areas where there is a persistence of TB in chronic breakdown herds, the Committee attach a number of caveats. These include the use of hard borders like major roads and rivers and other safeguards to address the risk of the perturbation effect. This is where badger removal can disrupt social structures, leading to badgers moving over larger areas, potentially transmitting the disease to other badgers and cattle.

To understand if the new strategy is effective, the Committee believe it must be accompanied by scientific monitoring and evaluation. If measures are not shown to be effective, then they should be stopped or changed. Furthermore, to ensure transparency, they call for the programme's scientific evidence to be subject to external independent evaluation.

In light of the differences in Wales and England to managing the risks associated with wildlife (animal welfare and agriculture are devolved matters), the Committee consider it imperative that there is a robust process in place for cross border liaison. This includes the need for Defra when considering exercising badger culls, to consult the Welsh Government and that to ensure that no cull zone in England comes within 2 km of the border with Wales.



The Committee also considered the potential implications of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. They recommend that current European funding for the Welsh Government's testing and eradication programme should be guaranteed in future budgets.

### What happens next?

The Cabinet Secretary is shortly expected to make a statement setting out the Welsh Government's finalised TB Eradication Programme. Given the significant challenge that bovine TB represents, this statement will be a significant one for both animal welfare and the agriculture industry.

You can find out more about the Assembly's Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee and its up-coming work on its [website](#). Previous blogs on bovine TB can be found on the [In Brief website](#).

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