

INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC GROUP ON CATTLE TB

Chairman: Professor John Bourne CBE MRCVS

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PRESS RELEASE

BOVINE TB: INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC GROUP PUBLISHES FINAL REPORT

The Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) today published its Final Report, *Bovine TB: The Scientific Evidence*.

The Report describes the outcome of nearly ten years' work which has provided a broad understanding of the complex issues involved in the epidemiology of TB in both cattle and badgers. The potential of badger culling for cattle TB control and the likely effectiveness of enhanced cattle based control measures have been evaluated.

The ISG has concluded that, although badgers contribute significantly to the cattle disease in some parts of the country, no practicable method of badger culling can reduce the incidence of cattle TB to any meaningful extent, and several culling approaches may make matters worse. The ISG also conclude that rigidly applied control measures targeted at cattle can reverse the rising incidence of disease, and halt its geographical spread.

Publishing the Report, ISG Chairman Professor John Bourne said:

“The objective of our work, outlined in this scientific report, has been to seek scientific truth and to provide clarity on the major issues that need to be considered for gaining control of cattle TB.”

“We believe that in this Report Ministers now have sufficiently robust and extensive evidence to enable informed policy decisions to be made. They now have the sound science they require.”

Concluding, Professor Bourne said:

“After nearly a decade of work we believe that we have fulfilled our original aims and are now able to provide a comprehensive appreciation of the overall problem. Our findings will surprise some, and be unwelcome to others.”

“Having shown that the main approach to cattle TB control should be rigorously targeted to cattle, we hope that the overwhelming scientific evidence we have provided to support this view, and the policy options we present, will enable the farming industry and Government to work together in a constructive and cooperative

manner to tackle this very serious disease of cattle which causes so much economic loss and hardship to cattle farmers”.

Cattle tuberculosis (TB) was almost cleared from Britain in the 1970s but has since re-emerged as a major problem for British farmers. Badgers (*Meles meles*) were implicated in spreading the infectious agent (the bacterium *Mycobacterium bovis*) to cattle and between 1973 and 1998 cattle-based TB controls were supplemented by various forms of badger culling.

A scientific review of the issue, chaired by Professor John Krebs (now Lord Krebs) and completed in 1997, concluded that there was “*compelling*” evidence that badgers were involved in transmitting infection to cattle. However, it noted that the development of TB policy was hampered because the effectiveness of badger culling as a control measure could not be quantified with data then available. Professor Krebs’ team therefore recommended the establishment of a large-scale field trial of the effects of badger culling on cattle TB incidence, to be overseen by a group of independent experts.

The Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) was formed in 1998. In addition to designing and overseeing the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT), the ISG identified and initiated a broad array of research related to the diagnosis, pathogenesis, dynamics and control of TB in cattle and badgers. This report – the ISG’s 6th and final, formal, report – describes the outcome of this research, which provides a previously unavailable scientific basis for the design of future TB control policy.

Notes to editors

1. *Bovine TB: The Scientific Evidence* is available from the ISG website | <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb/isg/index.htm> and from Defra publications (quoting reference PB12634) telephone 08459 556000.
2. Further information about the ISG, their work and published papers is available | at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/tb/isg/index.htm>

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