

News story: More frequent cattle testing to boost fight against bovine TB

An image of cows in a field.

Bovine TB will be caught and stamped out more quickly in England's cattle herds under plans to strengthen testing in the highest-risk areas of the country.

Six monthly routine tests will be introduced for all herds in the High Risk Area – mainly the South West and parts of the Midlands – with annual tests preserved for herds that have gone five or more years without disease, and farms accredited under the [Cattle Herd Certification Standards \(CHeCS\) scheme](#), requiring tougher biosecurity measures to be observed.

[Grants](#) to vaccinate badgers in the Edge Area of the country – the 'buffer' between the High Risk and Low Risk Areas – are also available now for schemes to run next year.

These moves are part of the government's comprehensive 25-year plan to eradicate bovine TB in England and come as [recent peer-reviewed research](#) shows badger control in Gloucestershire (58%) and Somerset (21%) – where culling began in 2013 – has contributed to significant reductions in the disease in herds.

[Results](#) published today also confirm that all 19 licensed intensive badger control operations achieved the badger population reductions needed to realise disease control benefits.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

Our comprehensive strategy to eradicate bovine TB is delivering results. We are introducing more frequent testing of cattle to find and stamp out disease more quickly than ever before, to add to our tough restrictions on cattle movements to stop disease spreading. We are also addressing the disease in wildlife and it is encouraging to see early research shows badger control is having the expected results in driving down levels of TB.

Chief Veterinary Officer Nigel Gibbens said:

This year's results show that badger control can be delivered successfully on a much wider scale, with all 11 new areas delivering effective operations. Expansion into further areas,

alongside our robust cattle movement and testing regime, will allow us to achieve and maintain long term reductions in the level of TB across the South West and Midlands where the disease is widespread.

In the Edge Area of the country, testing frequency will become more risk-based from January 2018, with more herds undertaking six-monthly testing. This will help vets identify and address outbreaks more quickly, helping to stop the spread of disease to new areas.

The government is offering grants under the Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme, which recommences in 2018 and aims to create a buffer zone between the highest- and lowest-risk disease areas of England. The scheme is open for the first round of applications until 19 January and successful applicants will receive a government grant for at least 50% of their costs from a fund worth £700,000 over four years.

Dealing with Bovine TB in England costs taxpayers over £100 million a year, required the culling of more than 29,000 cattle in 2016 and causes devastation and distress for rural communities.

Other measures announced today as part of the government's 25-year strategy to eradicate bovine TB are:

- New compensation arrangements for pigs, sheep, goats, deer and camelids which have to be slaughtered because of bovine TB. The changes will come into force on 2 January 2018 and will bring statutory compensation in line with arrangements in Scotland and Wales.
- Reduced compensation for animals which are unclean when presented for slaughter.
- Delayed slaughter of pregnant cattle which test positive for bTB.

Farmers can also access practical guidance on the TB Hub website, which brings advice from farming experts, vets and government together in one place.

Background:

1. The [recent research paper](#) referred to is Brunton et al (2017) Assessing the effects of the first 2 years of industry-led badger culling in England on the incidence of bovine tuberculosis in cattle in 2013-2015. Ecology Evolution. 7 (18). 7213-7230.
2. The vaccination grants application page can be accessed [here](#).

3. The cull results can be accessed [here](#).
 4. In September, the government awarded a contract to the Origin Group to deliver a new bTB advisory service. The easily accessible service offers clear, practical advice to help farmers in High Risk and Edge Areas to protect their herds from the disease and manage the impacts of a TB breakdown on their farm.
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[News story: Consultation on fees for marine licences](#)

Defra has today [launched a consultation](#) on proposals seeking to revise the marine licensing application fees applied to England and the Wales and Northern Ireland Offshore marine areas. Changes are needed in order to maintain marine licence applicant fee rates in-line with the costs incurred by the Marine Management Organisation in determining a marine licence application.

This is being proposed to make sure the cost burden associated with administering licences for development lies with beneficiaries and not taxpayers.

Detailed information on the proposals is included in Defra's consultation document, but includes:

- availability of self-service licences
- a simplification of charges for a routine marine licence
- an increase in the hourly rate charged for routine and complex marine licences (from £94 to £122 per hour)

The proposals were previously discussed by the MMO's Chief Executive, John Tuckett, during a hearing of the [Environment Audit Committee in the House of Commons](#) in January 2017. They are also part of a wider [programme of improvements in marine licensing](#) to make sure that the process it is as efficient as possible and proportionately manages risks to the marine environment.

Businesses and industry representatives have been involved in this work and their views are being used to develop appropriate processes and services, such as a [self-service approach for some marine licences](#), which is mentioned in the consultation document.

The consultation runs until 2 February 2018. If any changes are agreed it is anticipated they will come into effect in March 2018. Further details will be provided in advance of any changes taking place.

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Speech: New Year Message from British Ambassador to Maldives James Dauris

The relationship that the Maldives and the UK enjoy is long-standing. We are connected through history, through shared interests and concerns and, perhaps most importantly, through people.

This year British tourists have again made a very important contribution to Maldives' economy. This year around a hundred thousand British holiday makers have visited your extraordinary country and I'm sure they will have enjoyed it. Of course a few people fall sick or get into difficulties and we are again grateful to the Maldives police and coastguard for the consular support they have given us during the year.

Education has long been an important tie for us. I'm pleased that this year we have again been able to help talented young Maldivians to study at prestigious British universities through our Chevening scholarship scheme, and it's great that we were able to sponsor a local journalist to join journalists from around South Asia for some training.

On a quite different theme, the threat from terrorism is one that countries around the world face today, Maldives and the UK among them. We've done some great work this year with the Maldivian authorities on aviation security issues. And we've provided training for security managers of resorts all around the country. I'm looking forward to more of this sort of cooperation – sharing best practice and working together helps to keep us all safe.

We have continued to support important work that is being done in Maldives on women's issues. Through the year I've really enjoyed meeting lots of people, men and women, in Male and on other islands who share my belief that our societies are better off when women and girls are able and encouraged to participate in all sorts of activities, including in business and politics.

Both as British Ambassador and as someone who has grown fond of your country over the two plus years that I've been in my position, I've seen things that worry me happen too. The freedoms to speak, to write, to meet, to justice, to choose are ones that should really matter, to all of us. We are hoping that we will see these freedoms start to flourish again in the coming year.

Since I was young I've had a strong interest in the environment and in effective conservation. In Maldives, beauty and environmental fragility go hand in hand. Experiences of countries around the world show us that coral reefs destroyed are impossible to replace, areas of mangrove bulldozed almost impossible to re-establish. It's because the Maldives are so unspoiled that many people choose to visit. Going forwards I think that getting the balance between economic interest and conservation is one that will need careful thought and principled decision-taking.

Looking to 2018, everyone will agree that one of the most important events is going to be the presidential election. Almost every Maldivian I meet tells me of their hope that the election and the whole election process will be fair, and that voters will have a real choice and a free choice. In the UK, we share that hope.

I trust that you will share my wish that, in Maldives, in the UK and around the world, we will see values that make our societies peaceful and prosperous, tolerant and fair, prosper in the year ahead, and our communities grow stronger and happier for it.

May I wish you success and happiness in the coming year.