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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
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Badger Culling Policy in England

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by
the Department for Environment Food &
Rural Affairs*



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Alessandra Siino,
Secretary of the Bern Convention
Council of Europe
F-67075
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CEDEX
France

Our ref: 2019/04
Date: 22 April 2026

Dear Alessandra Siino

Complaint No. 2019/04: Badger Control Policy in England

1. This update is submitted in response to the Bureau's letter of 17 July 2025 regarding the above-mentioned complaint, which requested that the United Kingdom (UK) provide a progress report on steps taken to end the licensed culling of badgers ("the badger control policy") for the purpose of preventing the spread of bovine TB in England.
2. In accordance with the UK's previous reports, the badger control policy has, in effect, come to an end across England. See paragraphs 5 and 6. No further badger control licences can be issued under current policy in England's High Risk and Edge Areas¹. The UK Government has a clear preference for non-lethal wildlife control in all circumstances. The last remaining licence has been reviewed and culling under that licence has now ended, with a move to badger vaccination currently under consideration. As a result, it is expected that there will be no licensed badger culling for the purposes of controlling bovine TB in England in 2026.
3. The UK Government has continued to bring the badger cull to a close, delivering on the intentions set out in our previous reports and continued to expand the use of non-lethal approaches. See paragraph 7. Most notably, the rollout of badger vaccination has accelerated, and further capability is now being actively developed.
4. The United Kingdom invites the Bureau to take note of our update and to move to closure of this stand-by case file.

¹ <https://tbhub.co.uk/preventing-tb-breakdowns/bovine-tb-risk-map/>.

Ending the badger control policy in England

5. The badger control policy has now ended in England's High Risk and Edge Areas. All 20 licences active there last year have permanently ceased culling operations following expiry of their licences in January 2026. As set out in our previous interim report of 16 January 2025, there is no policy provision for granting any further licences in these regions.
6. There was one remaining licence in Cumbria in the Low-Risk Area. As with all licences, it was granted for a four-year period and is subject to annual review. That review has now been completed, and culling under this licence has ended, with a move to badger vaccination in 2026 currently under consideration in line with the UK Chief Veterinary Officer's advice. On this basis, no licensed badger culling for the purpose of controlling bovine TB is expected to take place anywhere in England in 2026, which would mark the conclusion of the badger control policy.

Progressing to non-lethal interventions

7. As set out in our communication of 16 January 2025, and reflecting the UK Government's clear preference for non-lethal wildlife control, the badger vaccination programme has expanded significantly, with over 4,000 badgers vaccinated in each of the past two years – the highest annual totals recorded in England. The Bureau will also wish to note the following substantive progress made on the initiatives outlined in our previous interim report:
 - a) *Launching the first national badger population survey in more than a decade.* Initiated in February 2025, the survey is now in its second winter of fieldwork, with completion anticipated later in winter 2026/27. The Bureau may also wish to note that, while this survey is still underway and results remain preliminary, the early indications provide reassurance regarding the status of the species in England. Data submitted so far suggests that active badger setts continue to be widely distributed across all bovine TB risk areas. Specifically, active setts have been recorded in 64% of surveyed one-kilometre squares in the High-Risk Area, 68% in the Edge Area, and 55% in the Low-Risk Area. Although these findings are not yet complete, they are consistent with the understanding that badgers remain a widespread and stable species in Great Britain which are not of conservation concern.
 - b) *Awarding £1.37 million in June 2025 to the National Farmers' Union for a new farmer-led badger vaccination project in Cornwall, in southwest England.* This initiative is designed to test a range of delivery approaches to further support the future scaling-up of badger vaccination efforts.
 - c) *Rapidly developing a new badger vaccination field force.* In less than a year and a half since setting out this ambition, the UK Government has completed a full competitive procurement process and has awarded a contract to the successful supplier. This new capability will build on the proven farmer-led

model in East Sussex² and extend vaccination to several further areas of England where bovine TB remains high and worsening, helping to protect badgers against infection.

- d) *Advancing plans to establish a national wildlife TB surveillance programme*, including the commencement of testing badgers found dead on roads for TB in several counties later this spring.

Refreshing the bovine TB strategy for England

8. The UK Government is also progressing work – co-designed with stakeholders – on a new bovine TB strategy for England. We expect to present this strategy in the coming months; however, as this work remains under development, we are not in a position to comment on its detailed content at this stage. Ministers will consider all recommendations arising from the strategy, considering them on the basis of their overall effectiveness, proportionality and appropriateness in supporting long-term disease-eradication objectives.

Conclusion

9. The UK Government is mindful that the Bureau's recent consideration of this matter appears to have moved beyond the grounds on which the original case was submitted, seemingly based on several unverified assertions made by the complainant. For a complete picture of the evidence, we strongly encourage the Bureau to take account of the findings of the independent review of the Government's bovine TB strategy, led by Professor Sir Charles Godfray along with the latest accredited official statistics on bTB in Great Britain, which feature significant lows in both herd incidence and herd prevalence.
10. As set out in this response, the badger control policy has, in effect, now come to an end in England. These developments, together with the reassuring early indications from the ongoing national badger population survey at paragraph 7a, further underline that there is no substantive conservation or policy matter remaining for the Bureau to consider. We therefore respectfully invite the Bureau to proceed to move to closure of this stand-by case file.



Simon Mackown
Head of Species Recovery
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² 'VESBA' is a five-year Defra-funded project that has enabled the local farming community to deliver badger vaccination across a 250 km² area in East Sussex.