



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report by the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee entitled Refreshing Wales' Bovine TB Eradication Programme.**

Our bovine TB Eradication Programme was introduced in Wales in 2008 with the vision of Wales becoming officially TB Free.

Much progress has been made since 2008, and we continue to bring in changes to the Programme, which build on and strengthen measures already in place. In 2017, a regionalised approach to TB Eradication was introduced, with the creation of Low, Intermediate and High TB Areas. This regionalisation formed the basis of an enhanced approach with measures implemented through a Delivery Plan.

We understand the devastating impacts a TB breakdown can have on farmers, and their families, with far-reaching implications across the farming industry. The long-term TB statistics show the positive strides we have made in tackling bovine TB. However, we recognise more needs to be done to further strengthen our approach and improve collaboration. It is clear we can only tackle this disease by working together.

The recent consultation offered all interested individuals and organisations the ability to provide constructive input into a refreshed TB Eradication Programme and help shape our policies going forward. In May, we published a summary of responses to the consultation.

I welcome the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee's report on Refreshing Wales' Bovine TB Eradication Programme. I am particularly pleased to see the Committee's recommendations are broadly in line with our proposals and will be considered, alongside the consultation responses and other information, during the development of a refreshed TB Eradication Programme. I have set out my response to the report's individual recommendations below.

## **Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations:**

### **Engagement with farmers and the wider industry**

- **Recommendation 1**

Welsh Government should follow a co-production route when developing policy around bovine TB eradication.

- **Recommendation 2**

The Welsh Government must treat farmers and the wider industry as equal partners in policy development and ensure farmers feel empowered by the refreshed eradication plan and responsible for its success.

### **Welsh Government's response to Recommendations 1 and 2:**

#### **Accept**

I support the principle of co-production and involving farmers and industry in developing and delivering our TB eradication policy.

The Task and Finish Group on Farmer Engagement has recently submitted its final report and the importance of ensuring a unified, equal partnership approach to TB eradication is reflected throughout. I will be reflecting on the core recommendations the group has made and considering them as part of the refreshed approach to TB Eradication process. The Group's recommendations will be published on the Government webpages in due course.

The Governance arrangements of the TB Eradication Programme, including the role of stakeholders, was, amongst other things, subject to consultation between November and February. The summary of responses can be found here: <https://gov.wales/refreshed-tb-eradication-programme>

I will be taking account of the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on Farmer Engagement and the summary of responses to the consultation when considering the next steps.

I will be publishing a Written Statement on the TB Eradication Programme later this month.

**Financial Implications:** None.

Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

- **Recommendation 3.**

The Welsh Government should engage with the Governments of New Zealand and Ireland in order to learn lessons from their success with engagement of farmers and the wider industry.

### **Welsh Government's response to Recommendation 3:**

#### **Accept**

We are already engaged with the Governments of New Zealand, Ireland and others on their TB Eradication Programmes and approach to engagement.

These conversations are open and ongoing. It is important to ensure any changes are viable in Wales, taking account of the needs of the agricultural industry and its relationship with Government.

The Farmer Engagement Task and Finish Group has been considering engagement with the industry and has provided recommendations. I am considering these recommendations to inform a refreshed TB Eradication Delivery Plan.

**Financial Implications:** None.

- **Recommendation 4.**

The Welsh Government should engage with DEFRA so that it can learn lessons from and replicate the success of the TB Advisory Service in England.

**Welsh Government's response to Recommendation 4:**

**Accept in principle**

The Welsh Government is in continuous discussion with DEFRA on TB policy. We have taken an active interest in how the TB Advisory Service has been developed and have endeavoured to learn lessons from areas of success.

The Welsh Government continues to review the support it provides to farmers impacted by TB. The recent Task and Finish Group on Farmer Engagement considered veterinary intervention and Cymorth TB amongst other things. A workshop is being developed to run at the Royal Welsh Show to specifically consider the role of vets and vet led teams. Lessons from TB Advisory Service will form part of this.

Further, a review of Cymorth TB will include substantive discussions with DEFRA, the TB Advisory Service and Welsh Veterinary Delivery Partners to consider lessons learned and how these might be adapted for Wales

**Financial Implications:** None.

Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

## **Informed purchasing**

- **Recommendation 5.**

If the Welsh Government introduces mandatory informed purchasing the system must be based on high quality accurate data which needs to be made available rapidly in a system that works.

- **Recommendation 6.**

If the Welsh Government introduces informed purchasing it should work with the UK Government to introduce compatible systems in Wales and England at the same time due to cross-border movement of animals.

- **Recommendation 7.**

The Welsh Government must ensure EID Cymru is accurate, can hold information on all relevant diseases and is compatible with systems used across the UK.

### **Welsh Government's response to Recommendations 5, 6 and 7:**

#### **Accept in principle**

Informed purchasing proposals were included in the consultation on a refreshed TB Eradication Programme and I am actively considering the responses, alongside other information, in order to inform a refreshed Delivery Plan. If the informed purchasing proposals go ahead, I acknowledge work will be required to ensure data systems can deliver the required information in a timely manner.

Regardless of any decision on an informed purchasing regime, the Welsh Government has committed to build the structure to enable the display of TB and Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) data from the launch of the new EIDCymru identification and movement system. However, EIDCymru does/will not hold disease data, but draws data from other sources in order to display it.

**Financial Implications:** Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Agriculture and Sustainable Development Division will support the preparatory work to allow the display of TB and BVD data from launch of the identification and movement system.

## **Testing**

- **Recommendation 8.**

The Welsh Government should undertake a detailed socio-economic impact assessment of any changes to the TB testing regime. The outcomes of this assessment should be shared with the Committee.

### **Welsh Government's response to Recommendation 8:**

#### **Accept**

Various aspects of the TB testing regime were subject to consultation. Changes to our approach to TB testing in Wales will be subject to full assessment.

**Financial Implications:** None.

Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

- **Recommendation 9.**

Whilst undertaking its impact assessments on testing, the Welsh Government should look at the long-term impact including the ongoing need to compensate farmers for removed cattle into the future.

### **Welsh Government's response to Recommendation 9:**

#### **Accept in principle**

Any changes to our approach to TB testing will be subject to full assessment, which will include payment analysis. TB Payment proposals were included in the consultation.

**Financial Implications:** None.

Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

## **Shortage of vets**

- **Recommendation 10.**

Welsh Government should prioritise exploring the viability of introducing TB lay testers with the farming and veterinary industries.

### **Welsh Government's response to Recommendation 10:**

#### **Accept**

Welsh Government are aware of resourcing challenges being faced by the veterinary industry. We commissioned an external research organisation to undertake a review of the options to supplement our veterinary capacity for TB testing through greater use of lay testers.

Once we receive the final report, following consideration, we will implement a pilot project to test any recommended approaches and will engage with all relevant stakeholders, including our veterinary delivery partners and APHA. The final report will be published online.

**Financial Implications:** None.

Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

## **Compensation**

- **Recommendation 11.**

The Welsh Government should use TB compensation payments to reward good farming practices.

- **Recommendation 12.**

If the Welsh Government chooses to introduce a tabular compensation system, they must ensure that farmers rearing high value (e.g. pedigree) cattle are not treated unfairly and do not lose out.

### **Welsh Government's response to Recommendations 11 and 12:**

#### **Accept in principle**

The TB Payments questions within the consultation attracted great interest from respondents. Whilst there were mixed views, most respondents agreed with the proposal to link payments to the implementation of disease prevention and control practices.

I note the Committee's recommendation that the Welsh Government should use TB payments as a reward for good farming practice and also view if table valuations were introduced, keepers of high value pedigree cattle should not lose out.

The aim of any TB Payments regime must be to pay a fair and appropriate amount for cattle slaughtered under the TB Eradication Programme, whilst also ensuring it is fair for the tax payer.

#### **Financial Implications:**

The TB Payments regime is currently subject to consideration. Resulting costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

## **Wildlife**

- **Recommendation 13.**

The Minister should write to the Committee setting out:

- Whether the Minister feels she has the correct level of data on the incidence of bovine TB in wildlife to model how extensive the badger vaccination programme needs to be;
- The Minister's views on how economical badger vaccination is; and
- Any cost analysis of badger vaccination (if undertaken) or Welsh Government plans to undertake this work.

### **Welsh Government's response to Recommendation 13:**

#### **Accept in principle**

- Whether the Minister feels she has the correct level of data on the incidence of bovine TB in wildlife to model how extensive the badger vaccination programme needs to be;

BCG vaccination is known to reduce the severity of TB infection in individual badgers and transmission within badger populations. However, the effects of badger vaccination on cattle TB incidence has yet to be quantified in Great Britain.

A retrospective herd-level case-control study to evaluate the effects of badger vaccination on bovine tuberculosis incidence in cattle in England and Wales is currently being designed by APHA. The study will evaluate effects of badger vaccination from 2010 to 2016 on TB incidence in cattle up to 2017. Data used in the study will include that collected during the badger vaccination project in the Intensive Action Area (IAA).

Without understanding the effect of badger vaccination on cattle TB incidence it is difficult to model how extensive a Welsh badger vaccination programme needs to be. I look forward to examining the outcome of the study and will certainly work with my officials and the Wales TB Epidemiology Team to utilise that information.

Also, in Wales, we have commissioned the collection of badgers found dead since 2014. The results of the badger found dead survey are used to investigate the relationship between bovine TB infection in badgers and cattle. The survey has increased our knowledge of the levels of *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*) infection in badgers.

Examination of the temporal and spatial prevalence patterns using data from 2014-2016 (Schroeder et al 2020) demonstrated that the *M. bovis* isolates from badgers tended to be similar to the genotypes of cattle in the same area, except in the Low TB Area. The direction of any cross-species transmission and the drivers for this could not be determined from this study.

The spatial variations described in the study support the need for the regionally adapted surveillance and control measures introduced in 2017. This passive surveillance adds to epidemiological reporting and is used in enhanced TB breakdown management, helping us to develop policy at both local and national levels.



- The Minister's views on how economical badger vaccination is;

Badger vaccination operations are labour intensive and the costs of which form the majority of the total expenditure. Typically, it can take two experienced operators up to 3 weeks to complete a round of work, from the initial survey, to setting the traps to catch and vaccinate badgers.

Other than the IAA, subsequent badger vaccination operations have been relatively small scale. However, privately delivered vaccination projects make cost savings with regards to labour, accommodation and vehicle costs.

We recognise the desire amongst some cattle keepers to utilise badger vaccination as a protective measure against TB on their own holdings. Subsequently, in 2013 the Welsh Government made available a badger vaccination grant of up to 50% of the eligible costs as a means of sharing the costs of future badger vaccination. Grant windows have continued to be made available since then, enabling farmers, landowners and other organisations in Wales the opportunity to take positive action to tackle the reservoir of bovine TB that exists in badgers. Vaccination reduces the level of bovine TB in a badger population and reduces the potential for onward spread of the disease to cattle. The Badger Vaccination Grant scheme also allows a greater number of badgers over a larger area to be vaccinated than could be achieved by Government alone.

Wildlife conservation organisations have demonstrated substantial savings can be made when using voluntary labour.

- Any cost analysis of badger vaccination (if undertaken) or Welsh Government plans to undertake this work.

As is the case stated above, it is difficult to undertake a cost analysis on any perceived benefit gained without understanding the effect of badger vaccination on cattle TB incidence. However, by supporting badger vaccination operations we are enabling proactive landowners the opportunity of taking additional measures to protect their herds.

**Financial Implications:** None.

Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

- **Recommendation 14.**

The Welsh Government should work with partners to undertake a study to increase knowledge of how bovine TB is transmitted between cows and wildlife, between wildlife and cows and within the wildlife population.

**Welsh Government's response to Recommendation 14:**

**Accept in principle**

The results from a number of studies which examined the relative rate of transmission between and within species have recently been published.

The strongest evidence so far is currently being provided by the modelling of Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) results.

The studies are providing similar results but varying between whether cattle to badger or badger to cattle transmission is higher and this may depend on local circumstances.

All of these studies so far have recognised within species transmission as being significantly higher.

The Oxford pipeline project Viewbovine is to be released on an APHA system - this enables users to identify the location of cattle samples with close genetic similarity to be identified and establishes locations of the animal from which the sample was derived.

Development of clade phylogenetic trees, which can include wildlife samples analysis of these trees can establish some **but not all** transmission information, depending on where on the tree a sample sits – genetic data can only be lost, not gained. The more samples added to these trees the more understanding that can be gained.

ViewBovis development – provides an improved user interface to access automated pipeline systems, the importance of including non-bovine data as well has been identified to developers.

We will continue to work with partners, particularly DEFRA and APHA. Developments in WGS technology, Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms and phylogenetic trees will add to our epidemiological understanding of local disease transmission.

It is now not really so much about understanding the mechanisms of transmission in greater detail, as we know they occur, but more about understanding the relative frequency with which they occur and why in different local situations.

**Financial Implications:** None.

Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.