# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE** | **Implementation of additional contiguous testing in the Intermediate TB Area North (ITBAN)** |
| **DATE** | **15 October 2018** |
| **BY** | **Lesley Griffiths, AM, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs** |

In October 2017, as part of a refreshed TB Eradication Programme, the Welsh Government adopted a regionalised approach with the introduction of Low, Intermediate and High TB Areas. This has meant measures can be tailored to address varying risks and disease drivers in each ‘TB Area’. This allows measures to be taken quickly, flexibly and at a local level to drive down disease and react to any localised increases in disease. In line with these safeguards, I am today announcing the introduction of additional contiguous testing in the Intermediate TB Area North (ITBAN) as part of our long term goal to eradicate bovine TB in Wales.

Government epidemiologists have identified an unprecedented increase in new incidents in the Intermediate Area North. This spike is not a short term trend and it is clear the rate of new incidents will not reduce unaided. Last year there was a 75% increase on the previous 12 months.

My priority is to protect the status of the Low TB Area of North Wales and to expand it to include new areas in the ITBAN that meet the appropriate disease pre-requisites by 2023. A disease spike in an area adjacent to the Low TB Area endangers these aspirations. In view of this, from 13 November 2018, I am proposing to extend the use of additional contiguous testing around Officially TB Free Withdrawn (OTFW) breakdown herds in the ITBAN. This additional testing in herds with increased risk of becoming infected will result in a doubling of the effort expended on identifying disease in the area adding a further 2 contiguous tests at 6 month intervals into the regime.

To support farmers in the ITBAN during this difficult time, I have agreed to the introduction of Government subsidised “keep it out” veterinary visits for herds which have tested negative to contiguous testing. These visits will be delivered by the farmer’s own local practice via specially trained vets and will look at the local disease picture, biosecurity and the farm’s cattle trading policy and improved informed purchasing mirroring the approach used in TB breakdown Cymorth TB visits.

An important point I want to promote in the ITBAN, and indeed elsewhere in Wales, is that introducing new animals into a herd can be a potential disease risk with regards TB, and other cattle diseases. So a key objective here is the use of Informed Purchasing to minimise the risk of disease incursion. Encouraging farmers to consider the TB history of the herd cattle are being purchased from so that an informed assessment can be made to manage the risk of introducing TB into their herd. This will include asking questions about the testing history of the animals concerned and through the use of the ibTB tool.

My officials are working closely with those in Defra to ensure that, although policies may on occasion differ, consistent messages are provided on each side of the border. I believe that this is of particular importance with regard to the information provided through the “keep it out” visits in Wales and the work of the TB Advisory Service (TBAS) in England when promoting good biosecurity and informed purchasing. The focus is on delivering these measures through active engagement and partnership with local stakeholders.

The Welsh Government’s approach to the eradication of TB incorporates addressing all sources of TB infection, including cattle-to-cattle and the role of wildlife. We have seen good progress toward achieving our goal of eradicating bovine TB from Wales. The introduction of additional contiguous testing within the ITBAN will put us in a stronger position to ensure we continue to make progress towards a TB Free Wales. I have committed to reporting on progress on the refreshed TB Eradication Programme in April next year once we have a full calendar year of data.

My officials have written to all farmers in the ITBAN explaining the disease situation in the area and setting out the additional measures that we are putting in place at a local level.