



The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

27 April 2020

Dear Secretary of State

COVID 19 PANDEMIC : 2020 BADGER CULL LICENCES

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, Natural England currently has all its staff team working from home and no field operations are being undertaken. Taking this into account, any cull operations licensed by the Government this year are not likely to be subject to any independent monitoring by Natural England field operatives, for the purposes of animal welfare, cull contractor observation and public safety.

Culling could be expanded to 50 zones in England this year, resulting in over 50,000 badgers being killed, the vast majority by a controlled shooting method which is condemned as inhumane by the British Veterinary Association. Many of the badgers killed by this controversial culling method have been reported to take up to five minutes to die of blood loss and organ failure (as recorded by the Government Independent Expert Panel in 2013).

Without independent monitoring of any type, the numbers of badgers subjected to unnecessary suffering could increase. Given the Government's commitment to maintain high standards of animal welfare and public safety in relation to culling operations, we have grave concerns that these cannot be upheld.

Policing the badger culls has also proven a hugely costly and labour-intensive operation. For example, in 2018 the total policing costs were over £3 million for 32 areas of the country, including £800,276 for Devon and Cornwall and £484,892 for Cheshire.

Should the Government expand the culls to 50 zones in 2020 we can expect the total policing costs alone to exceed £5 million. Despite the Covid-19 restrictions, it is likely that direct action protesters will



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seek to oppose the culling operations and, although the Badger Trust does not condone such actions, this will have an impact on policing requirements.

At a time when the police are facing the most difficult period in modern history maintaining law and order and public safety during the Covid-19 pandemic, we believe there can be no justification for deploying hundreds of officers across the country at huge taxpayers' expense to oversee the killing of tens of thousands of badgers.

Should the badger cull continue and be expanded in 2020, we estimate that it will require thousands of cull contractors operating as shooting and trapping teams across large parts of our countryside. Each of these cull contractors would pose a risk of Covid-19 transmission in the wider rural community as a result of working in teams and coming into contact with farmers and landowners, the police and members of the public.

To reduce the risk, cull contractors would require scarce personal protection equipment and use tens of thousands of body incineration waste bags. They would also have to undertake thousands of non-essential journeys to carry out their culling activities and to dispose of badger carcasses at incineration facilities.

The Badger Trust therefore believes a decision by the Government to halt the badger cull in 2020 would be in the best interests of common sense, public health, animal welfare and efficient use of police resources, particularly at a time of unprecedented national health and economic emergency.

This letter is being copied to the President of the National Farmers Union, Minette Batters, and the Chair of Natural England, Tony Juniper, and will be released to the media and the public.

Yours sincerely

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CEO Badger Trust



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