# Government defies scientific advice with expanded badger cull despite promises to end it



Government officials have initiated a new round of badger culling, even as the UK’s scientific community raises significant concerns about its effectiveness. The decision, led by Natural England, allows for supplementary culls across nine regions, stretching from Derbyshire to Wiltshire, and extends culling periods in ten additional areas from September. Scientific advice from Natural England's director of science, Peter Brotherton, explicitly recommended against supplementation this year, citing a lack of justification for further culling. He articulated that the expected positive outcomes from previous culls should remain for at least two years, arguing for a transition towards vaccination as a more humane alternative to manage bovine tuberculosis (bTB).

The ongoing culling policy, initiated in 2013, aims to control the badger population to combat bTB in cattle, which has led to compulsory slaughtering of over 278,000 cattle and approximately 240,000 badgers in a decade, costing taxpayers more than £100 million annually. Last year alone, over 10,000 badgers were culled, with critics now estimating that another 5,000 may fall prey to this year's measures. Despite these figures, opposition groups, including the Badger Trust and Wild Justice, plan to challenge the government in court, arguing that the culling policy is not only scientifically unfounded but harmful to wildlife conservation efforts.

Compounding the controversy, the Badger Trust noted that the majority of bTB transmission occurs cattle-to-cattle, a fact echoed by numerous experts in the field. Nigel Palmer, the Badger Trust's chief executive, described the government's decision as "utterly indefensible," given the overwhelming evidence against the culling strategy. This sentiment is mirrored by broader calls for an overhaul of the policy pursuing bTB eradication.

Advocacy for a vaccines-focused strategy has gained traction, with government pledges promising to end the cull by 2029 in favour of a new approach. This strategy proposes the establishment of a dedicated vaccination field force, aiming not just at badgers but also at developing measures to monitor and control cattle health. While earlier government statements underscored a commitment to curtail culling, current actions indicate a disjunction between policy promises and implementation, leading to public frustration and increasing legal scrutiny.

The landscape of bTB management in the UK is marred by a lack of clear direction and persistent debate. As critics and scientific advisors alike call for innovative strategies, the government's ongoing endorsement of culling as a primary tool raises serious questions about its efficacy and ethics. The anticipated announcements regarding supplementary licenses later this year will likely be pivotal in shaping both public perception and wildlife policies moving forward.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/badger-cull-licence-area-2025-b2761061.html), [[6]](https://www.badgertrust.org.uk/post/legal-update-ongoing-efforts-to-stop-the-badger-cull)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/badger-cull-licence-area-2025-b2761061.html), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-end-badger-cull-with-new-tb-eradication-strategy), [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/government-vows-to-end-badger-cull-in-next-five-years-13205923)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/environment/government-defra-rspca-england-parliament-b1179286.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy847je742do)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.badgertrust.org.uk/post/legal-update-ongoing-efforts-to-stop-the-badger-cull), [[7]](https://www.itv.com/news/2024-08-30/government-aims-to-end-badger-culling-within-five-years)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/badger-cull-licence-area-2025-b2761061.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-end-badger-cull-with-new-tb-eradication-strategy> - The UK government has announced a new bovine tuberculosis (bTB) eradication strategy aiming to end the badger cull and reduce bTB rates. Over the past decade, bTB has led to the compulsory slaughter of over 278,000 cattle and more than 230,000 badgers, costing taxpayers over £100 million annually. The new strategy, developed with input from farmers, vets, scientists, and conservationists, focuses on strengthening disease control measures to protect both cattle and badger populations.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/environment/government-defra-rspca-england-parliament-b1179286.html> - The UK government has pledged to end badger culling within five years as part of a new strategy to eradicate bovine tuberculosis (bTB). Over 230,000 badgers and 278,000 cattle have been killed in efforts to control the disease, costing taxpayers more than £100 million annually. The new 'holistic' strategy includes a badger vaccinator field force to increase vaccination rates, measures to control cattle, a nationwide wildlife monitoring programme, and a pledge to expedite work on a cattle vaccine.
4. <https://news.sky.com/story/government-vows-to-end-badger-cull-in-next-five-years-13205923> - The UK government has pledged to end the culling of badgers within the next five years. The controversial practice has seen more than 230,000 badgers killed in the past decade in a bid to reduce the spread of bovine tuberculosis. More than 278,000 cattle have been killed to try and control the disease in the same period. These measures have cost taxpayers over £100 million. Instead of culling, the government plans to implement a vaccination strategy to protect both cows and badgers.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy847je742do> - The Badger Trust has mounted a legal challenge against the granting of new culling licences. The charity argues that Natural England ignored the advice of its own scientific experts in allowing the measure to go ahead in areas including Dorset, Wiltshire, and Oxfordshire. The cull is aimed at reducing the spread of bovine tuberculosis (bTB), but there is a growing call to support further evaluations of community-led badger vaccination. Natural England said it could not comment on legal action.
6. <https://www.badgertrust.org.uk/post/legal-update-ongoing-efforts-to-stop-the-badger-cull> - The Badger Trust, alongside partners Wild Justice, Born Free, and Eurogroup for Animals, is pursuing legal action against Natural England and Defra for rejecting their own scientific advice to end supplementary culling. This decision undermines evidence that the practice is ineffective and harmful. The next supplementary cull is scheduled to start in June 2025, and the organisations are working to prevent it. They are also challenging the UK Government through the Bern Convention for posing a significant threat to badgers as a native species.
7. <https://www.itv.com/news/2024-08-30/government-aims-to-end-badger-culling-within-five-years> - The UK government has pledged to end badger culling in the next five years before summer 2029. In the past decade, more than 230,000 badgers and 278,000 cattle have been killed to control the spread of bovine tuberculosis (TB). The Labour government will replace culling with a new vaccination strategy for badgers and cattle to ensure they are 'less susceptible to catching and transmitting TB'.