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Backbench Business

Badger Cull

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Before I call the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) to propose the motion, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the hon. Lady will deliver her speech from a sedentary position. I commend her for coming to the House today; we appreciate that she is recovering from surgery. Given that she is speaking from an unaccustomed position and without the usual aid of an ability to bob up and down or otherwise gesticulate, the delivery of her speech will be more difficult than it would be if she were in her customary position. I am sure that the House will bear that in mind and give her all the support she deserves.

12.56 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the pilot badger culls in Gloucestershire and Somerset have decisively failed against the criteria set out by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in guidance to Natural England for licensing of the culls, which stipulated that 70 per cent of the badger population should be culled within a six-week period; notes that the costs of policing, additional implementation and monitoring, and the resort to more expensive cage-and-trap methods over an extended period have substantially increased the cost of the culls, and strengthened the financial case for vaccination; regrets that the decision to extend the original culls has not been subject to any debate or vote in Parliament; further regrets that the Independent Expert Panel will only assess the humaneness, safety and effectiveness of the original six-week period and not the extended cull period; and urges the Government to halt the existing culls and granting of any further licences, pending development of alternative strategies to eradicate bovine TB and promote a healthy badger population.

I thank you for your gracious comments, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure that the debate will be very well attended and, bearing that in mind, I hope that colleagues will accept that I will not be taking any interventions during my opening remarks. I know that the many right hon. and hon. Members here today will make this a lively and impassioned debate.

This is a timely debate, coming before any further roll-out of the culls, and particularly in the light of concerns being raised from many quarters about the culls. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for granting a full day's debate and vote on the Floor of the House. I have received a large amount of cross-party support for this debate. It is important to note that this is not a matter of one side of the House versus the other. The House wants a chance to vote on this issue and I have made repeated calls for it to be brought back before the House. I tabled my first early-day motion on 25 June last year calling for the matter to return, and 149 Members from both sides of the House supported it. I then tabled another on 31 October asking for a return, which attracted 107 Members. In a well-attended Westminster Hall debate on 11 Dec, I pleaded with the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for

Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), to bring the matter back before the House. Well, I have brought it back, with the support of many colleagues of all political parties. I hope that colleagues today will examine their consciences and try to do the right thing. I know that this is not an

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easy subject, and that feelings are running high on both sides, but we must not be seen just to be doing something, if we are now convinced that the facts and evidence indicate that we might have taken the wrong approach.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Main: I am sorry, but I have indicated that I will not be taking interventions.

The public might be surprised to learn that the Minister can instigate a cull without having to get the consent of the House. Consequently, there has been no substantive vote in Parliament proactively to adopt a culling strategy. Instead, we have merely had two votes not to adopt one. The two votes on the subject took place in Opposition day debates on 25 October 2012 and 5 June 2013. The most recent vote in the House of Commons, on 5 June, was 299 to 250 against the motion:

“That this House believes the badger cull should not go ahead.”

As the House can see, even in an Opposition day debate, the vote was a close one—and that was before we had gleaned all the information about the underperformance of the culls.

We all accept that the House has had an uneasy relationship with this topic, but we should not be here today to score political points or to try to rehash history. We should be here to examine our current position in a cross-party fashion and to give a strong steer to the Minister as to the next steps we believe he should take. I believe, as I am sure many other hon. Members do, that we should halt the culls and not issue any more licences until a full examination of the failings has been taken into account. That is what the debate is for; it is not a blame game. It is a recognition that hon. Members might wish to change their minds based on the change in facts.

There is great sympathy with farmers who have experienced heartache and hardship over losing cattle and precious stock to bovine TB. There is also regard for how we as a society treat all animals, but in particular a protected species. This tension has divided the House. I believe that many lent their support to the concept of tackling bovine TB with this strategy, but they did not give their Government permission to carry on regardless—regardless of humaneness, effectiveness or cost.

Performance criteria for the pilot culls were set by the Government, and they were not arbitrary, but intended to reassure hon. Members and the public that what was being done was an effective way of tackling bovine TB infections and was, crucially, humane. The reason for the 70% kill target within a six-week period was specifically drawn so that sufficient badgers would be killed to ensure that the badgers did not simply go elsewhere, thus spreading the TB more widely.

This approach reflected extensive research carried out by Professor Woodroffe in trials in the 1990s, which showed that a failure to kill this percentage in a narrow window of time could worsen matters as disturbed diseased animals took TB to new areas. Analysis commissioned by the Government found that the number of badgers killed according to the criteria fell well short of the target deemed necessary, despite the cull being extended and cage shooting being used. We must face

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up to the fact that this House, if we persist and simply roll out more free-shooting culls, may be contributing to an increase in TB in cattle.

The humaneness test set by Ministers was to ensure that no animal suffered needlessly a protracted, agonising death. Badgers were supposed to be free-shot quickly, efficiently and, importantly, cost-effectively. It is now understood, however, that between 6.4% and 18% of shot animals took more

than five minutes to die, and sometimes even as long as 10 minutes or longer. In order to avoid suffering, the standard to be met was that no more than 5% of shot badgers should take more than five minutes to die. An independent expert panel was appointed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to help Ministers to evaluate, against the Government's own criteria, the effectiveness, humaneness and safety of pilots, and its conclusions are damning.

Mr Harper: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]* Will Opposition Members listen to my point of order? I have been listening carefully to my hon. Friend quoting figures from an independent report. Are you aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether that independent report has been placed in the Library of the House or on the Table, so that hon. Members taking part in the debate may reference it? I was not aware that the report had been published.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I may be able to help the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and the House. Today, I received a response from the Minister who is present, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), which clarifies that the report has just arrived on the Secretary of State's desk. The pursuant question is why, when it was due to be published in February, it has not been published in time for today's debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) for his point of order. It is not in fact a point of order for the Chair, but it is a point that the House has noted. The hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) has been helpful in providing information to the House.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I always understood it to be a convention of this House that if any Member quoted from a document in the public domain, the document should be tabled before the debate, to be available to every hon. Member so that they, too, may quote from it. I do not believe that the document is yet in the public domain—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. That rule applies to Ministers; it does not apply to a Back Bencher addressing the House.

The matter is now at an end. The hon. Member for St Albans is referring to the report, which may come up and be debated for the rest of the afternoon; it is not for the Chair to rule on where the report ought to be. The hon. Lady is quoting from it, and I am sure that

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Members will listen carefully to what she is saying. They will then be able to deal with her points, with or without the report before them.

Mrs Main: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that passions are running high in this matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) must be psychic, because my next words were to be that no one appears to be disputing the comprehensive but leaked report. Whatever the detail, the dispute is about whether we pursue a failed policy, or adopt a new one.

As Professor Rosie Woodroffe, a scientist at the Zoological Society of London, said, the “findings show unequivocally that the culls were not effective”.

I know that hon. Members say, “We haven't seen the reports”, but that is not in dispute, unless the Minister whose desk the report has landed on says that it is not in the report. If so, I look forward to hearing it, but I believe what has been widely reported in the media after being leaked comprehensively.

I hope that the Secretary of State will now focus on other ways of eradicating TB in cattle. If predictions of the findings in the report are borne out, the cull

“has cost a fortune and probably contributed nothing in terms of disease control, which is really unfortunate.”

Those are the words of Rosie Woodroffe.

I am personally disappointed that a DEFRA spokesman has recently said:

“We knew there’d be lessons to be learned from the first year of the pilot culls which is why we’re looking forward to receiving the panel’s recommendations for improving the way they are carried out.”

If the House notes those comments carefully, it cannot hear the sound of any culls being stopped, but simply of them being improved. In other words, we are committed to finding a better killing strategy—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is my phone—someone who obviously does not respect the—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. In these unusual circumstances, this incident be overlooked. As I said at the beginning of the debate, these are unusual circumstances; no other Member may take this as a precedent.

Mrs Main: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps it was a badger ringing me up and willing me on.

If the House notes the comments, it will hear talk not of culls being stopped but of their being improved. The Government do not have carte blanche to carry on regardless. Hon. Members may dispute the report and whether it has been leaked, but the Government do not have unconditional support to continue with a failed approach, in particular one that causes suffering to a protected species. As Robin Hargreaves, President of the British Veterinary Association said:

“We have always stated that if the pilots were to fail on humaneness then BVA could not support the wider roll out of the method of controlled shooting”.

There are colleagues who share those views.

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The pilot culls were supposed to demonstrate a minimum of 70% of badgers killed within six weeks. Despite the badger population estimates being sharply cut and the culls being extended, both pilots failed to meet the minimum 70%. When both trials duly failed to kill sufficient badgers within the specified period, they were extended on the advice of the chief veterinary officer, Nigel Gibbens. The panel’s widely leaked report, although still disputed today, concerns itself with the initial six weeks. This extended the misery, the cost and, if we accept the time scales based on the original pilot criteria, the range of TB spread due to perturbation.

Do we continue with cruel practices licensed by the Government in order to be seen to be doing something? DEFRA agreed with an expert group the criteria for how the trials could be deemed humane. It was DEFRA’s rules, not some arbitrary figures plucked out of the air. Mark Jones, vet and executive director of the Humane Society International of the UK, said:

“The government’s boast that all badgers were killed cleanly and killed instantly is clearly not true. We fear many badgers may have suffered significant pain and distress.”

Andrew Guest, from the National Farmers Union, said of the revelations: “It doesn’t sound good”, but added that it was important that a significant number of badgers had been removed.

Simply getting rid of lots of badgers, regardless of cost, pain or effectiveness, was not the criterion set down by the Government. That is not a good enough reason for this House to support ongoing culls. This House wishes to tackle bovine TB efficiently, effectively and humanely. That is why we

need to stop the failed cull policy, not grant any further licences and come up with a better method to tackle TB without inflicting pain and misery on an endangered species. The badger culls were condemned as “mindless” in 2012 by Lord Krebs, who commissioned the 10-year study. The extensions to the culls were criticised by Natural England’s lead scientific director, Sir David Attenborough, and the National Trust.

We acknowledge the devastation inflicted on farmers and cattle by the scourge of bovine TB. This should not be about the House abandoning their plight, but neither can we ignore the plight of the badgers. Monitoring reports from England’s wildlife watchdog, Natural England, apparently seen by *The Guardian* and perhaps hotly disputed by some hon. Members, show that a third of the badgers were shot in the wrong part of the body. Apparently, badgers are very hard to shoot, although I would not know as I am not a marksman. Two out of nine badgers had to be shot twice, having not died instantly.

Professor Woodroffe, who worked on a landmark 10-year study of badger culling, said the conclusion to be drawn was simple:

“The pilot culls have not been effective.”

She questioned the multi-million pound cost of the culls and argued that badger vaccination would be cheaper and more effective. So our argument today is probably leading us towards vaccination of badgers and/or cattle. The current available vaccine for badgers, which is injectable, has been shown to reduce the burden of disease in badger populations. An oral badger vaccine is not expected until 2015. I know there is some concern that vaccines may not be as effective as we would hope,

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or be licensed and come on line quickly enough, but if the current shoot-to-kill approach is also deeply flawed we should endeavour to strengthen and prioritise all the non-lethal methods in order to find a humane solution.

Many hon. Members and wildlife lovers believe that is the only way forward, unless we are to decide to keep slaughtering badgers in perpetuity to eliminate a reservoir of TB in badgers, many of which will have been infected by other species or cattle. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth told the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) in DEFRA questions that the Government

“accepts that there is a range of measures we should pursue, including developing vaccines, and we are doing some work to develop an oral vaccine for badgers as well as on cattle vaccines. We are considering other measures such as contraception for badgers and increased cattle movement controls, so we are covering a range of issues as we try to solve this difficult problem.”—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2014; Vol. 575, c. 998.]

That answer shows that the Minister recognises the value of these other strands of TB control, and I hope that he will commit today to redoubling his efforts on those fronts. Today, we need to urge the Government not only to speed up their work on vaccines, particularly of the oral kind, and redouble their efforts on enforcing biosecurity and cattle movements, but, most importantly, to stop this inhumane slaughter of badgers.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call speakers from the Back Benches, may I say that it will be obvious to the House that a large number of Members wish to speak this afternoon and so, as a courtesy to other Members, it would be helpful if Members limited their speeches to about eight or nine minutes? If they do so, everyone will have the chance to be heard.

1.12 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I will bear those comments in mind. Let me start by paying tribute to the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main), whom I have the privilege of following. She has shown astounding bravery and dedication in turning up for this debate so quickly after major surgery.

This debate is important not just for wildlife, but for the cattle industry, the dairy industry and the farming industry more generally. We need to acknowledge that and put it on the table at the very beginning. We all acknowledge the importance of tackling bovine TB. The debate on this issue so far has, to some extent, been polarised, so today's debate is an opportunity to bring the House together to forge a new consensus on how to tackle this difficult problem.

I wish to focus on three aspects of the debate. First, I wish to deal with how the outcomes of the recently completed pilot culls differ from and deviate from those of the randomised badger culling trial, which took place a few years ago. Secondly, given the time limits, I wish briefly to refer to the alternatives. Thirdly, I wish to refer to the Bow Group recommendations on how to proceed in the future, which are incredibly interesting and constructive.

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Mr David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Smith: Very briefly, because I am aware of the need to keep my contribution short.

Mr Heath: I appreciate that, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. Given that a lot of people wish to find a degree of consensus on this issue, I am genuinely curious as to why the motion makes no mention of the comprehensive strategy developed by the Government last year, which includes things such as polymerase chain reactor recognition of infected setts; an edge of disease strategy; greater biosecurity; and the routes to infected vaccines. Why is none of that mentioned in a debate that is supposed to be bringing the House together?

Angela Smith: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated much of what I am going to say about the constructive way forward.

The first and most important point to make about the pilot culls relates to the meeting of the scientific experts convened by DEFRA in April 2011, which drew two key conclusions about the pilot culls. The first was that the culls needed to be

“conducted in a co-ordinated, sustained and simultaneous manner”

over a short time period in order to minimise potential impacts of perturbation. The second key point was that

“the more that a future culling policy deviates from the conditions of the RBCT...the more likely it is that the effects of that policy will differ”.

Those two important points are at the heart of today's debate. They explain why a target was set of a 70% reduction in badger density in the cull areas in six weeks, but we find—this is not because of the independent expert panel report—that Natural England withdrew licences after 11 weeks of culling in both zones because it was evident that there was no hope of reaching the target number of badgers.

I wish briefly to address why the targets of 70% and six weeks were chosen. The six-week target was set by DEFRA in the context of the lessons learned by the RBCT, which found that the proactive culls that were completed across entire areas in eight to 11 nights had a much higher likelihood of delivering a positive impact than the prolonged culls—the reactive culls that took place—over more than 12 nights. The risk of the latter is that TB in badgers is further elevated and thus it is expected that any benefits in relation to reducing cattle TB are undermined.

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): The number of badgers in the area was one of the

issues raised in previous debates. Obviously, the 70% target is dependent on having a reasonable estimate of the number of badgers in a particular area, and I understood that not to be available.

Angela Smith: This is the “badgers moving the goalposts” argument, which repeatedly comes back to haunt this debate. The important thing is to have accurate numbers, not least because we do not want to break the Bern convention, and therefore the law, in terms of taking the risk of eradicating an entire species.

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On four occasions, the RBCT conducted non-simultaneous culls—this comes back to the point about the short period of time, as they went on over a prolonged period. It was found—the evidence is there—that there was an increase in the proportion of badgers infected, over and above the background norm of the increase in numbers infected by the proactive culling.

In 2010, DEFRA’s science advisory council said:

“There is little useful data on the issue of what time period should be considered as ‘simultaneous’. The Group advised that if culling was carried out in a period of up to 6 weeks (although preferably less), that is likely to reduce the adverse effects of non-simultaneous culling; this advice is based on opinion and not on evidence. The longer the period that culling is carried out in, the less confident one can be that the deleterious effects seen with non-simultaneous culling as carried out in the RBCT will be minimized.”

That is from DEFRA’s own science advisory council. It is absolutely clear that the pilot culls took a fairly significant risk in planning to meet the six-week target. The fact that they failed comprehensively to meet that target supports the claim in the independent expert panel report that the pilot culls were ineffective; they took 63 and 77 nights respectively. Remember that the randomised badger culling trial found that to maximise impact, a cull should take place over eight to 11 nights.

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Smith: I will give way just one more time, because a lot of people want to speak.

Roger Williams: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. She said that the randomised badger culling trials occurred over 10 to 11 days, but of course they failed miserably to reduce the number of badgers in a way that met their objective.

Angela Smith: The reactive culling in the RBCT did fail. That is not the point. I am talking about proactive culling, which is best carried out over eight to 11 days. Reactive culling is when one kills the badgers in a small area—a hot spot—and does not go back again. The proactive culling is done over a bigger area—that is the important point—annually. It is a much more scientific approach to culling. Reactive culling does not work at all; in fact, it makes the problem a lot worse.

The 70% figure, which is an average, is based on proactive culling. It was demonstrated in the RBCT that it did deliver reductions in cattle TB incidence in the culling zone on a gradual basis. There was, however, a rapid but diminishing increase outside the zone. That is where the 16% figure in the RBCT report comes from. It is often not reported, however, that the 16% figure was based on a scenario that was more optimistic about the potential beneficial impact of culling overall. In fact, the average reduction over nine years was 12%. That is why the Independent Study Group on Cattle TB said that culling could not deliver any meaningful reduction in bovine TB. That is the key point.

Reactive culling reduced badger density by 30% and elevated cattle TB; that is the point that I was making earlier. The problem is that it is not known scientifically where between 30% and 70% removal an effect on TB is

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achieved, hence the importance of the 70% target. Scientifically, it is the only target that one can use to measure effectiveness.

In summary, the requirement to kill at least 70% of local badgers within six weeks was not an arbitrary target. It was a scientifically driven target. As I have said, the six-week target was set because prolonged culling over more than 12 nights further elevates TB in badgers and is expected to undermine any benefits for cattle TB control. In terms of both the length of the culling period and the targets for numbers killed, the pilot culls failed comprehensively. That prompts questions about the future of culling. If we are to go ahead with more culling, Ministers have to answer this key point: killing effectively, over less than six weeks, will require far more marksmen and far greater resources, so that we can do the work simultaneously. One of the key lessons to be learned from the pilot culls is that we would need much greater resources to do the job, and I am not convinced that taxpayers are prepared to pay for that kind of resource.

It was found in the end that the pilot culling had to make use of cage trapping in addition to free-shooting. That points to the need for much greater resources. If we include policing in the costs, we are looking at more than £4,000 per badger shot in the pilot culls. On the alternative, vaccination costs £2,250 per square kilometre covered. When looking at cage trapping, and whether to vaccinate or cull, we have to remember that vaccination is much cheaper, partly because policing costs are removed from the equation, but also because with vaccination there is no need to dispose of the carcasses of badgers culled. We all know that there is a massive army of volunteers ready to help the Government conduct the vaccination. In fact, there is already an initiative to deliver vaccination on a wider scale.

I quickly want to refer to the other important part of the alternative.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I am sure that the hon. Lady will very soon draw her remarks to a close.

Angela Smith: Of course I will, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It must be remembered that cattle testing and movement is an important part of all this. Vaccination, cattle movement and testing, and biosecurity make up the package of measures that we need in order to move forward. I am sure that other Members will refer to some of the details.

In concluding, I want to refer to the Bow Group report, an excellent piece of work from the right of the political spectrum. We have the spectacle of a Labour MP recommending a Tory report, but it is an excellent report—thorough, sensible, and evidence-based. It has a number of recommendations, all of which are sensible. I want to focus quickly on three key recommendations. The report recommends that farmers no longer be allowed to move their herds from one of their farms to another without pre-movement testing. That is an important point, because currently they are allowed to do so. They should not be allowed to move their herds to agricultural shows or common land without pre-movement testing.

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The report recommends more testing and increased use of the gamma interferon test, alongside the currently used test. I understand that the Government have moved on all this, but the report makes it clear that more needs to be done. Importantly, it recommends field trials of cattle vaccine, as recommended by the European Commissioner only last November, but so far we have heard nothing from DEFRA on when it will move ahead with that.

The Commons has an opportunity today to move on the issue and forge a new consensus. We should build on initiatives already taken by DEFRA on cattle movement and testing, and on biosecurity; and we should carry out vaccination on a comprehensive scale, and drop the culling.

1.28 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith).

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) on securing the debate, on leading it with her sterling contribution, and on showing such strength in such difficult circumstances. I absolutely agree with her that we have to learn to treat all animals, whether farm or wild, the same. We need to consider the implications of the economics of the case. I am sure that others will give more detail, but we have to recognise that the number of new cases of bovine TB is on the rise; it is doubling every nine years. In the 10 years to last November, 310,000 cattle across Great Britain were slaughtered, and last year, between January and November alone, 30,377 otherwise healthy cattle were slaughtered—an average of over 90 a day. In the last 10 years, bovine TB has cost the taxpayer £500 million, and there is an expectation that that will rise to £1 billion over the next decade.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD) *rose—*

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con) *rose—*

Miss McIntosh: I will take two interventions now, and then no more.

Stephen Lloyd: I appreciate that the figures are still high, but does my hon. Friend agree that a recent report shows that in 2013 there was a significant drop of 14% in the incidence of TB in cattle, and the rate that the disease is spreading also declined by 7% in 2013? The figures are going down.

Miss McIntosh: I stand by the figures that I have just given.

Mark Pritchard: Does my hon. Friend agree that animal welfare campaigners and farmers want to see healthy cattle and badgers, and that is why I welcome her preamble? Does she also agree that this Government should focus on vaccines, as the last Government should have?

Miss McIntosh: I will come on to vaccines.

I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans and the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge said. The House is very short of alternatives. If we are to have a mature, intelligent debate, the House and the public need to consider what the realistic alternatives

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are. The badger population was in decline and was given protection in the 1970s, for very good reason, but when we see the extent to which the population has grown and the implications for the spread of bovine TB, the position is very serious. I have two auction marts in my constituency, one in Thirsk and one in Malton, and the implications of the cattle restrictions generally are difficult for them.

I want to make a general point about the six-day rule. I understand the position with regard to the cattle restrictions relating to bovine TB that are in place in the south-west, and the need for a swift response to any potential animal disease. But, particularly at red cattle marts such as Thirsk, the operation of the six-day rule, as intensive and as regulated as it is, is having a negative impact. Many livestock producers will not take their cattle or sheep to mart—it is true that there are fewer pigs now—on the basis that they may not be able to obtain the price that they need and they will have to go to slaughter anyway. I hope that the Minister will look favourably at reviewing the six-day rule. It could be brought back swiftly if need be.

The sad fact, which has been demonstrated in today's debate, is that not many of us living in Britain today have close rural roots. When a pilot cull was introduced in Ireland, it proceeded smoothly, effectively, clinically, and virtually without disruption. Do the Government have anything to learn from the conduct of the Irish cull? The fact that many of us now live metropolitan lifestyles leads,

regrettably, to an increasing misunderstanding of animal husbandry and welfare issues.

In the few moments that I have left I want to commend to the House the work of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on vaccination against bovine TB and the Government's response. I am delighted to record that both Front-Bench teams were well represented on the Committee when it took evidence. We looked carefully at injectable vaccine for badgers, oral vaccine for badgers and oral vaccine for cattle. There are difficulties with each that we can rehearse this afternoon, but will the Minister update the House today on where we are, particularly with regard to reaching agreement in Brussels with our European partners and at home on each of those matters?

I pay tribute to the work of the Food and Environment Research Agency in Sand Hutton in Thirsk and Malton—

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Miss McIntosh: I am reaching a conclusion.

FERA is doing work on sterilisation. Oral contraception has been referred to, and the sterilisation of the badger population would be welcome, but it will inevitably have a cost implication. There are also questions about its practicality. It would make sense for the Minister to update us today on that work and to review its cost implications and practicality. That could be a real alternative. I was not aware of it until the Select Committee had the opportunity to visit FERA. Today's debate is particularly timely as we consider the alternatives to produce a healthy cattle and a healthy badger population.

1.35 pm

Mr Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): I rise in support of the motion. I congratulate colleagues on both sides of the House who tabled the motion and

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I thank the Backbench Business Committee for enabling the debate to take place. It has become clear over recent weeks and months that some colleagues who initially supported a cull are now beginning seriously to question that position. I thank the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main), who, I appreciate, has now left the Chamber, because she was one of the first people to draw to my attention some serious reservations about what the Government had done.

The starting point on this issue and the common ground we are probably all on is that we do have a serious problem in England with bovine TB. So how do we reach agreement on reducing the scale of the problem, leading hopefully to its eradication? Both sides need to be honest. Under the previous Government we spent 10 years and some £50 million on trialling culls, and the outcome was no real meaningful contribution to eradicating TB in cattle. With the recent pilot culls we have witnessed an abject failure for farmers, taxpayers and wildlife.

The two pilot culls failed to achieve their own success criterion of culling 70% of badgers in six weeks. Against sound science, they were extended and spectacularly failed again to cull target numbers. The leaked IEP report shows that DEFRA failed to meet its main test for humaneness, as we have already heard this afternoon and will no doubt hear again—

Mr Harper: I take a particular interest because one of the cull areas covered a significant part of my constituency, and I am interested in the humaneness of the tests. I think that today's debate, in asking the House to take a view, is premature. I meant what I said. I was disappointed that my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) did not take my intervention, which was why I raised a point of order. I want to see that report in its entirety to be able to make a judgment about the cull as carried out and also, if the culls continue, whether there need to be any changes. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the House needs to see that report before it can reach a proper decision?

Mr Brown: I respect the hon. Gentleman, but his own Government, Ministers and the Secretary of State have done nothing to give anyone any confidence in what was going on. Perhaps we will hear from the Minister later, but the constant delay has done nothing more than make people extremely suspicious about what was going on. It was almost as if there was an attempt to find reasons why what was done was correct. So he and I will have to part company there because I am not convinced that what he is saying is correct.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that that shows the danger of Governments trying to be seen to be doing something when they have no idea what to do? In this case, it has resulted in great cruelty and a failure.

Mr Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Let us be honest: from time to time, we in this Chamber should realise that no one side has a monopoly on the answers to the problems, whether those problems are in our rural communities or our cities, although we must recognise that certain views sometimes need to be more respected on certain occasions.

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I was referring to the leaked report and to the issue of humaneness. It has been suggested that no more than 5% of the badgers should take more than five minutes to die, but the IEP found that the actual figure was between 6.4% and 18%. Over time, the Opposition have made a series of reasonable, rational and, importantly, cross-party requests of the Government, none of which have been met to date.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend not agree that the Government entered into this with a preconceived idea about their approach and with a closed mind, particularly the Secretary of State? As anybody who has watched any of the television interviews knows, he would not consider anything else, but his methods have led to abject failure.

Mr Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, which takes me back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry). It is about making it look as if something is being done, but, all too often, it results in even more damage.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the badger cull was the wrong thing to do and that we should have followed Scotland's example, as it achieved BTB-free status in 2009 without culling anything. However, he must acknowledge the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath), which he also announced when he was a Minister: the Government have also done the right thing by restricting cattle movement, which is probably a contributory factor in the fact that bovine TB incidence is now falling in England.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. Mr Brown, you are being very generous in giving way to other Members, but may I gently remind you that we have agreed to keep our remarks to eight or nine minutes, including interventions? I hope that will mean that those intervening will eventually be able to speak.

Mr Brown: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I must say that I have been known to be generous to a fault on many an occasion.

All I can say to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) is that I had not realised that my writing was that large, as he has obviously seen what I am about to say. The story is totally different in other parts of the UK. In Wales, there has been a significant and substantial reduction in the disease, with decline at twice the rate of that in England. That has been achieved without culling but with badger vaccination and stringent measures on cattle that have been handled properly. In Northern Ireland, bovine TB is declining at a faster rate than in the south, where culling is taking place. As the hon. Gentleman has said, in Scotland we are fortunate—I shall put it no more strongly than that—to be clear of bovine TB, but we are not complacent and tight biosecurity is in place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) is absolutely correct

that this is about biosecurity and vaccination. Whether Members will accept it or not, there is a small army of volunteers who want to engage with farmers and others to try to eradicate the disease through a vaccination scheme.

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Professor Rosie Woodroffe, a leading badger ecologist, questioned the licence extensions and their potential to increase the spread of TB through perturbation. She said that going from six to 14 weeks, as happened in the Gloucestershire cull area, was uncharted territory—so it is about things being seen to be done rather than about grappling with the issue. In November, she said:

“It is not unreasonable to expect that as you prolong the cull and you prolong increased badger movement, you increase the detrimental effects.”

In December, she said:

“It’s very likely that so far this cull will have increased the TB risk for cattle inside the Gloucestershire cull zone rather than reducing it...Culling low numbers of badgers, over a prolonged period, during these winter months, are all associated with increased TB.”

I hope that those who are now thinking seriously about what has happened will realise that it is an issue not of crying over spilt milk but of seeing that we have it wrong and asking about the scale on which we have it wrong. I hope that Members will support the consideration of vaccination and tight biosecurity so that we can make some moves towards eradicating this terrible disease from our countryside.

1.45 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Unlike those of the previous speakers, my constituents have cattle. They also have experience of TB and are wrestling with the problem.

I am sorry that the debate is taking place at all. I have a great deal of respect for the Backbench Business Committee, but it would have been considerably more helpful if it had waited to hold the debate until after the report had been published. If we have a scientific report, it is worth reading it before having the debate.

Huw Irranca-Davies: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has mentioned once again the IEP report and it might help the House to know that we now know, as I have had a response today, that the report is available and on the desk of the Secretary of State. May I ask through you whether the Minister and officials, through their good offices, could produce that immediately and put it in the Library? We still have time to look at it and consider it in the debate. That would help all Members.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): That is clearly not a matter for the Chair, but the Minister will have heard the hon. Gentleman’s point and, as he has said, there is plenty of time left in the debate at the moment.

Bill Wiggin: I am grateful to you for your judgment, Madam Deputy Speaker. Unlike the shadow Minister, I do not have access to the Secretary of State’s desk. Even if he has the report, I have not seen it and neither have my hon. Friends. Even if it is available today, we should have read it before we had the debate.

Let me return to the core of the debate, which is science and whether the Government have paid sufficient attention to the scientific detail and acted accordingly. It is wrong in every way to base an argument on a leaked report before its conclusions are in the public domain. Whatever our view, particularly if we are unsure about badger culling, we should take some comfort in

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knowing that before the Government roll out the policy across the country they test it with pilot schemes. Further comfort should be taken from the fact that they ensure that effectiveness and humaneness are the key factors that are tested.

We might find it hard to know without references from scientists whether a badger dies quickly or slowly when hit by a bullet. We might want to know whether the number of badgers culled is sufficient to prevent the spread of bovine TB. We cannot know these things unless the experts have published their reports, yet we are discussing the issue without the report. I can see the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), waving bits of paper at me, but I want the constituents we all represent to have the same information as everybody in this House when we comment on this.

Mr Harper: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for giving way. Given that we are talking about the pilot cull and the House is being asked to make a decision about whether the cull should be rolled out, the point is not just about the report. If the report makes recommendations, we will want to know the Government response to them. We want the considered view of the Secretary of State and if he has only just received the report, he needs time to digest it and make some decisions.

Bill Wiggin: My hon. Friend is, as always, absolutely right.

Angela Smith: Even if we do not have the IEP report, we know that the pilot culls took 11 weeks rather than the RBCT's recommended maximum of 11 nights. That means that the pilot culls have failed, does it not?

Bill Wiggin: I hope that the hon. Lady agrees that I have been generous in giving way to her, because she had quite a long time to have her say. I regret bitterly that in her speech she did not condemn the activities of people protesting that might have meant that the tests took longer. She should have done that, because whatever the report concludes about the trials, it is indisputable that what applies to one species should apply to the others. If we cull cattle, we should cull badgers. If we vaccinate badgers, we should vaccinate cattle. It is inconsistent treatment of one species or the other that damages disease control. That is proven by the spread of the disease and the inconsistent record of the previous Government.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bill Wiggin: Yes, I will give way, although I must not give way much more.

Caroline Lucas: The words that the hon. Gentleman has just spoken are scientifically so wrong. All the evidence that we have seen demonstrates precisely that the strategy taken should depend on what species we are talking about and on the ecology. Just because culling makes sense in one context with one species at one time, it makes no sense to say that that means it is okay to do it in a different environment. The circumstances matter, not the general principle.

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Bill Wiggin: I am delighted that the hon. Lady is so completely and utterly wrong. The joy of that is that the evidence is before us all. We have seen the disease spread by the policies of people like her. She does not have cattle, she has never done a pre-movement test and she does not know what she is talking about. Unfortunately, this is too serious a subject for her to pontificate on. If she was right, the disease would not have spread in the way that it has.

I would like to see far better skin tests. The old skin test is extremely iffy. It gave my bull, Jackeroo, a false Johne's disease result. Happily, he subsequently proved to be free of the disease. I would like to see gamma interferon more readily available to any farmer who gets a skin test reactor. It would also be helpful if the Government were to publish the facts and figures proving that when a gamma interferon test is used, more TB reactors are detected earlier and the chance of getting a future clear test is significantly increased. If that is not possible, DEFRA needs to get us a better test.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Very briefly, what does the chief veterinary officer for the Government suggest should happen?

Bill Wiggin: We would love to know. We would love to know what the Government think of the report, but we have not seen it yet.

I have always preferred vaccination, and I believe that it should be targeted at healthy badger populations where the chance of a badger being infected is low but likely to increase due to their proximity to infected populations. This means vaccinating healthy badgers working inwards, geographically, towards the centre of infection. Professor Woodruff gives an excellent speech on the benefits of an immune population and how we can achieve that. This should also apply to cattle, and I am more than willing to do everything possible to help the Government achieve cattle vaccination.

There are endless arguments to suggest that vaccination is better than culling. I am more than willing to accept those arguments, but they cannot apply unless they apply to both species. We need to redouble our efforts to prevent damage to our export markets from vaccinating cattle. It is not widely known that meat from infected cows showing less than one lesion already makes its way into the food chain. It is also the case that milk from an infected cow is safe to drink after it has been pasteurised. Therefore, there is no reason why pasteurised milk and vet-inspected meat should not be available for export from vaccinated cattle. I think the House may find that it already is.

After the pathetic European response to the horsemeat scandal, I do not believe that the European Union has a strong case to ban our exports. The response from the European Commission is unhelpful and is another reason why, if for no other, we should leave the EU. I hope the Secretary of State will join me in campaigning to leave the European Union and one of the benefits will be that we can vaccinate our cattle.

If we are going to base our decisions on science, we should ensure that the scientists have been heard.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Will my hon. Friend give way?

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Bill Wiggin: No.

Today's debate is unworthy of a Division and I hope that the House will not divide until it has had time to read and digest the report.

Martin Horwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bill Wiggin: No.

If the EU is going to ban our exports if we vaccinate, it should do so on proper health grounds. It will not be able to achieve that. If the Opposition object to scientific pilot schemes, they must apply the same science to badgers and to cattle equally. For 14 miserable years they did not do that. If the Government want to beat this disease scientifically, they will have to analyse what the scientists say and allow us to act within the law.

It is worth pointing out that there are many who believe that if the pilot culls are a failure, we should revisit gassing. I hope I am not alone in saying that I would hate to see that. Ultimately the House should unite in wanting to see healthy badgers, healthy cattle and healthy people. Unless we

are consistent, scientific and determined, we shall be beaten by a minuscule bacteria, and this is not a fight we can afford to lose.

1.54 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I shall be brief as I am the least expert person trying to catch Madam Deputy Speaker's eye and I am lucky to have done so so early in the debate. As a sponsor of the debate, my credentials are possibly the fact that I have a history of taking up relatively unpopular views. I do not win over many friends, certainly not on the Opposition Benches.

Members who have been in the House for some time remember that I was passionately against the hunting with dogs Bill—one of the few Labour Members to take that view. I remember trying to make that case. As someone who once had a smallholding and lost chickens and ducks to a fox, I never saw a more effective way of getting a fox than when some people turned up with hounds and on horse. I made myself very unpopular because I did not believe in gassing, lamping and so on; I wanted an evaluation of the best possible method. I made many enemies on the Labour Benches, but I do not mind taking an unpopular view on occasion.

This should be a cross-party debate conducted in harmony. For 10 years I chaired a Select Committee, and my watchword was always that we should be guided by evidence-based policy, where we can get it. I have read as much as I can from the House of Commons Library and every document that I have found as the badger culling debate goes on, and I have come to the conclusion that the evidence shows that bovine TB is a calamity. I have many farming friends who are desperate because friends of theirs have had it on their farms. It drives farmers to desperation and in some tragic cases to suicide when they get bovine TB and lose a cherished herd that they have bred.

My heart goes out to the farming community when they do not understand why DEFRA and the Government cannot grapple with the problem and get it sorted. This debate should be about how we get it sorted. I did not agree with all the characteristically robust remarks of the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin).

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He is toeing the party line a bit today, but I agreed with him about the science. All the science shows that the cull has not worked. The pilot has not worked and has probably made the situation much worse.

There are some amusing aspects to the process. At the time of the flooding I found myself ringing round the House of Commons Library and all sorts of technical friends to find out whether badgers can swim. I found out, to my surprise, that when they have to, badgers can swim. That made quite a hole in some of the boundaries that DEFRA was drawing, thinking that badgers would not cross water. I believe in evidence. I believe that the issue must be sorted. I cannot see any way forward, apart from vaccination. I believe that we must vaccinate both cows and badgers in order to sort the problem out. Let us do it.

There has been some argy-bargy today about whether we have seen the final report. We are all grown up men and women and we know there is a reason why the report has only reached the desk of the Secretary of State today and we do not have it for this debate, which everyone knew was coming up because we applied for it weeks ago. We know that games are being played.

I am chair of the John Clare Trust. If anybody wants to see the finest poem about badgers ever written by a human being, they should look up John Clare's poem "The Badger". For hundreds of years human beings have treated badgers appallingly, baiting them for pleasure, and I do not want to be associated with that in the modern form of culling them. They are a form of animal life that we should respect and love, and I do, as I love and respect the fox and cattle. Indeed, as some Members of the House will know, I have been involved in another long-running campaign, which is related to

the distaste for veal. Due to some bad publicity 30 years ago, almost every little boy calf born in this country is shot at birth and incinerated. That is dreadfully wrong. Now, at long last, we are getting roast veal coming back. I have respect for all sorts of animals.

Today is the chance to stop the silly disagreements over this matter. Every one in this House and in this country wants an end to them. We do not want the politics of “let’s have a cull to keep the farmers happy”. There is a bit of Government policy—I am talking about this Government and the previous one—that smacks of that. Let us today agree that there are scientific answers. We need a serious discussion with the European Union, and among ourselves, on how we evaluate the evidence and get this dreadful disease sorted. That is what farmers and lovers of wildlife want and what every Member of this House should want.

2.1 pm

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am delighted, Madam Deputy Speaker, to catch your eye in this debate. I draw Members’ attention to my declaration of interests. However, although I am a farmer, I do not have any cattle and therefore do not have any financially beneficial interests to declare.

I take no pleasure in talking about this dreadful disease. I am sure that everyone here today can at least agree that we have a serious problem. Given that the UK has the third largest dairy production and the fourth largest beef production in the EU in an industry worth about £8.4 billion, I want to ensure that that

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industry is not in any way jeopardised. We should all agree that badgers are at least part of the problem. Professor Donnelly has stated that nearly 50% of bovine TB incidents can be attributed to infectious badgers.

I think that this should be a cross-party issue. I hope that Members on both Front Benches can agree on a TB eradication policy, because whoever wins the next election will want to continue with it. I think that this debate is premature, and that it is impossible to come to some of the conclusions mentioned in the motion until the full copy of the report is available. I gather that the Government are about to publish a TB strategy, and until it is available and the Secretary of State has had a realistic chance to consider the report and the way the Government will go forward, we should not have this debate. Indeed, the timing now is unfortunate.

On 2 April, the Royal Society is to hold a high-powered seminar on the subject, to which I intend to go to learn the very latest scientific opinion. I agree with the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) that we should proceed on the basis of sound science—that obviously makes sense—and of cross-party agreement.

I stress to the House that we are talking about only trials. Let us try to learn the lesson from the trials. The lesson may be that we do not continue with them, that we do continue with them or that we continue with them in a different way. Let us at least try to learn it, and do it sensibly and maturely and in a low-key manner.

Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con): Does my hon. Friend also agree that we should learn lessons from other countries? The fact is there is no country in the world that has got on top of bovine TB without addressing its presence in the wildlife population. Ireland, which has culls, has reduced bovine TB by a third in recent years.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend brings me to the very last paragraph of my speech. In the Republic of Ireland, from 2008 to 2013, there has been a 50% reduction in the number of reactors—from 29,900 down to 15,612. For the first time ever, the Government of the Republic of Ireland think that they may well be able to reach TB-free status, which is what we should be aiming for in this country. What we want to see is healthy cattle and healthy badgers.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I have a choice over whom to give way to.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Is my hon. Friend also aware that Northern Ireland, which has never culled badgers and has no badger intervention in any place, has achieved a reduction of 12%, compared with only 8.9% in the Irish Republic?

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Common sense and logic should say to my hon. Friend that a 50% reduction in the south must have an effect on the north because there are fewer badgers. Without the culling in the south, there would not have been the reduction in the north.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab) *rose*—

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Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, but it will be the last intervention I take as we have been asked to be brief.

Albert Owen: The hon. Gentleman talked about countries. Wales is a country within the United Kingdom, and in February the Minister said that, between December 2012 and November 2013, 33% fewer cattle have been slaughtered because of TB. That is evidence from an area within the United Kingdom where no culling has taken place.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am not an expert on Wales, and I am sure that others who are situated in Wales will wish to speak in this debate and to refute that point. I simply note that there have been only three expressions of interests to extend the injectable trial in Wales. I suggest that that is because it is proving more difficult to carry out than the Welsh Government expected.

I wish to address my final few remarks to the culls and the lessons that are available to us. Although peaceful demonstration is perfectly acceptable, deliberate obstruction is not. Even less acceptable is the destruction of several hundred traps, which are private property and expensive items. That is what happened in Gloucestershire, and it was unacceptable. On learning the lessons, I concede—this is contrary to my former opinion—that the free-shooting of badgers is proving more difficult than was originally intended. In future trials, I expect that we will move towards the cage trapping of badgers and humane despatch, which seems to be a more satisfactory method than free-shooting. None the less, we will always need free-shooting to back up that system, because some badgers will never go into a trap; they are trap shy.

Much has been said about the one leaked sentence from the report that stated that a number of badgers took five minutes to die. I understand that that was how long it took the person who shot the badger to reach the badger and verify that it was dead. If there are a lot of obstructions in their way, it could well take more than five minutes to get from the place where the shot has been fired to retrieving the badger and proving that it is dead. However, those are all matters of speculation. We simply do not know, because we have not seen the report. When we get the report, we will be much better informed.

Many people seem to be concerned about the number of badgers that are being culled—roughly a few thousand in both trials. They should contrast that with the 30,000 cattle that have to be slaughtered each year under the TB regulations. I understand that many Members in this House are deeply concerned about animal welfare, as indeed am I having had a parent who owned stock all their life, but they should think of this. When a cow is slaughtered under the unacceptable halal regime, it routinely takes more than five minutes for them to die. If the anti-cull brigade would focus its attention on that, it really would be doing some good.

Much has been said in this debate about vaccination. I understand that the Secretary of State, in a recent conversation with the EU Commissioner, was told that it is likely to be at least 10 years before a licensed cattle vaccine is available. We simply cannot leave our farmers in limbo for that long. Even when a licensed cattle vaccine becomes available, we need an acceptable skin test—a

DIVA test—that will distinguish between vaccinated

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cattle and cattle that have the disease. Under the current BCG—Bacille de Calmette et Guérin—test, if an animal is vaccinated it will show up as having the disease. Members seems to think that a cattle vaccine is an easy thing to achieve, but the real question we must ask ourselves is whether countries around the world, let alone in the EU, will take our cattle exports if they have been vaccinated. That is a really big matter.

I am clear that culling on its own is not the answer, but neither is vaccination on its own. It would be if we had an oral vaccine that we could deliver to badgers, just as we did to foxes when we got rid of rabies on the continent. An oral vaccine has been just around the corner for the entire 22 years I have been a Member of Parliament, yet we still do not know when it is likely to appear.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) said, all around the world it has not been possible to eliminate a disease in cattle where there is a large wildlife vector. Whether it is white-tailed deer in Michigan, badgers in the Republic of Ireland or possums in New Zealand, in order to eradicate the disease in cattle we have to eradicate it in wildlife. I want to see a cold, sober debate in which the scientific evidence is fully evaluated, and I want the Government, hopefully on a cross-party basis if the Opposition will agree, to introduce a policy that will work. Let us ensure that we eliminate this dreadful disease once and for all.

2.10 pm

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): I speak in this debate very much as a layman. I am not a farmer or an expert on the scientific issues, and I do not think that we have the disease in Coventry, so I cannot even claim a constituency interest, but I have a deep hatred of unnecessary suffering in animals, and so much of it goes on, with vivisection and all the rest of it. Where there is no compelling evidence that such suffering is necessary, we must seriously question our consciences and our policies.

I am also aware, as I am sure is every Back Bencher—I heard the speech that my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) made at a party meeting last night and again today—that this horrid and hideous disease is hated right across the country. We feel deeply for the farmers who are wrestling with it on their farms. The worst thing we can do when we cannot see a way forward is grasp at the nearest solution that might do some good. The Government will then say, “We have no confidence that this will work, but if you want to pay for it, we’ll license it,” and that is when we know that we are at a dead loss. That is shown by the figures, because there has been a catastrophic failure—it cannot be considered anything else. It is not scientific evidence, but empirical evidence of people not being able to shoot enough badgers. It is as simple as that.

Andy Sawford (Corby) (Lab/Co-op): I met farmers in my constituency to discuss the cull, and they did not believe that it would be effective. I draw my hon. Friend’s attention to the remarks about suffering made by Professor David Macdonald, who chairs Natural England’s science advisory committee:

“I fear there will be two tragic losers, the farmers who are paying the crippling bill for extending this trial and the badgers whose lives may be lost for little purpose.”

Is that not the case?

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Mr Robinson: I thoroughly agree and thank my hon. Friend for that apposite intervention.

The hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), who represents a farming constituency, and who indeed is a farmer himself, was right when he said that vaccination would not have been an absolute solution for mad cow disease and that it is not yet a science-based solution to

this problem. I will mention in passing something I read in the March edition of a scientific journal—I do not suppose many colleagues will have heard of it. It talked about novel particulate vaccines utilising polyester nanoparticles, or bio-beads, which I assume would be ingested orally, that work rather counter-intuitively with the animals and could be a way forward. I do not know about that, but it is clear to me that much less research is now being done. Could not all the money that is being spent—wasted, frankly—on the culls be put into vaccine research? Ultimately, that is the only solution. A vaccine will not be a silver bullet, but it could be effective alongside all the measures the Government are considering, as part of a shared policy.

I will end my remarks by joining Members on both sides of the Chamber in saying how great it is that this debate has been arranged by the Backbench Business Committee. It is absolutely perfect. The hon. Member for The Cotswolds is perhaps lucky that the report is not yet out. If it had been, he might have had much less to say. He must accept that there is never a perfect time for these things. I congratulate the Committee, because I think that this has been one of the best debates.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Does my hon. Friend not think that there is sufficient evidence from Scotland showing how the vaccine worked there?

Mr Robison: To be honest, I do not know. I have read as much as I can. But I do know from the evidence so far that a vaccine would be much more humane and, if we put the resources into getting it, much more likely to succeed, taken with other measures, than the culls. The culls are counter-productive, because they are spreading the disease. They are miles off their targets. I cannot imagine why farmers would want to waste more money on them. I hope that the Government and the Opposition will now get together to find a way forward, because it is urgently needed. It is a challenge, but there is no better time to get a cross-party policy on the matter.

2.15 pm

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): It is a pleasure to contribute to a debate on this subject, as I have done on a number of occasions. It is important to commence my remarks, following those of the hon. Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robison), by saying that, coming from a rural constituency, and indeed a farming background, I think that the important point needs to be repeated once again: what we are talking about is the impact of a disease on the lives and livelihoods of farmers and their families. The impact of this terrible disease is, I believe, the biggest issue the farming industry currently faces, certainly south of the border.

Given all that, I think that we need to be reminded why we are here. Sadly, this is not about the welfare of the badger—of course, it should be—but about the future of the farming industry. It was on that basis that I first engaged with this issue, at the beginning of the

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randomised badger culling trials some 15 years ago. I was a member of the then Agriculture Select Committee that was looking at the issue and I strongly supported the roll-out of what was effectively evidence-based policy making introduced by the previous Government, and indeed proposed by Professor Krebs as a result of some earlier work under the previous Conservative Government. It was about building up an evidence base on which to go forward with a policy to bear down on this terrible disease, which is having a devastating effect on livestock farmers, especially in some parts of the country, such as west Cornwall.

Bob Stewart: Is this debate not about the welfare of cattle, the welfare of badgers and the fact that this horrid disease is spreading across the country more and more? We have to do something to find a solution.

Andrew George: Absolutely. This is, of course, about the impact the disease has on a whole range of wildlife, including badgers, but the primary focus, and the reason this is being driven, is the economic, emotional and social impact it has on the farming community and the viability of many

marginal livestock farmers, particularly in my part of the world.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman talks about evidence, and I think that we all agree totally that that is the right way forward. Does he not accept that the Government ignored the evidence and just went ahead with the culls? Everything that they were warned would happen has indeed come to pass.

Andrew George: I am on the record as having cautioned the Government about the roll-out of the two pilot cull projects.

I want to ground my comments on the evidence from the randomised badger culling trial. Some 15 years ago my constituency was selected as one of the triplets, so we had a proactive cull in part of the Penwith moors. I backed the cull because it was on the basis of evidence-based policy making. I followed with great interest the outcome of that research and its conclusions, which found that reactive culling had no part to play in the management of bovine TB in the livestock industry, and that proactive culling could have a meaningful impact only if carried out in a thorough manner that achieved a high level of cull consistently over a long period, which meant that it had to achieve a 70% cull rate within the hot spot areas and across a wide enough area. If the Government chose to adopt this policy, it was important that they did so in such a robust manner that it would have a real and demonstrable impact. My concern about their approach is that they wanted to do it in a manner that would not be at great expense to the public purse and therefore at the cost of the farmer, although of course the state had to step in to provide the support with policing costs, at great expense in the case of both the pilot culls. The outcome of this work ran the high risk of making the situation significantly worse.

That is why, as a result of looking at the Government's proposal, I proposed in my constituency the introduction of a community-led badger vaccination programme across a wide area—200 sq km. We are going to roll this out significantly later this year on the Penwith peninsula, working closely with the Zoological Society of London,

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which has now decided to take on a management role in it. Professor Rosie Woodroffe, who has been mentioned several times already, will be taking the lead on the project having originally been involved in the independent scientific group overseeing the randomised badger culling trials.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): Whatever our views on this subject, one need only remember what the Secretary of State himself said in this Chamber in October 2012:

“It would have been quite wrong to go ahead when it was not confident of reaching the 70% target and could have made the position worse.”—[*Official Report*, 23 October 2012; Vol. 551, c. 847.]

Those are the Secretary of State's own words. I wonder whether we are now getting from certain Government Members mere bluster to defend an absolutely abhorrent policy that is not helping the farming industry and certainly not doing anything for animal welfare either.

Andrew George: I think those who called for this debate were anticipating, or hoping, that the IEP report would be out by now, as it should have been. That would at least have ensured that the information was already in the public domain and had not been disputed by the many people who will have seen it. I think we can make a number of reasonable assumptions about the figures in the report regarding the lack of effectiveness of the two pilot culls. We have a significant amount of evidence to go on—and it will be found to be sound—that those projects failed to achieve even a 50% cull of badgers, even in the Somerset area where it is considered to have gone slightly better than in Gloucestershire. In these unfortunate circumstances, we have to move forward on the basis of the information that is currently in the public domain.

I wish to conclude my remarks with a couple of straightforward points. First, a number of people have alighted on a report from DEFRA this week that has highlighted the fairly significant fall in TB reactors in the herd across the country—down from 37,734 in the period until December 2012

to 32,620 last year. That has happened before the impact of the pilot culls or anything else can be taken into account, which might mean that a lot of the other measures that this Government and the previous Government have engaged in are beginning to show some effects. That cannot be ignored.

Secondly, I want to refer to the collective research that was brought together by Professor James Wood at Cambridge about a year ago. I do not have the document with me, but it showed that even in the herds that had been given the all-clear after a reactor, up to 25% continued to have latent TB within them. In this debate we are concentrating significantly on vaccinating rather than killing the badger population, but we should be concentrating a great deal more on biosecurity measures and ways in which we can bear down on the latent disease that still remains in the United Kingdom livestock industry. Even though it has been given the all-clear—

Roger Williams: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andrew George: I will, but I am probably testing the patience of others.

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Roger Williams: I respect my hon. Friend's views on these matters, but does he agree that however poor the tuberculin skin test is, it has been effective in reducing TB in previous times?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Mr George, it is not my patience you will be testing; it that of your colleagues who are patiently waiting to speak. For the third time, I remind Members that they must speak for eight to nine minutes, including interventions. Mr George, you have been speaking for 11 minutes.

Andrew George: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I will bring my remarks to a close by reminding people that I believe that vaccination is the way forward. It is the cheaper alternative for the Government, it is likely to be more effective, and it never runs the risk of making the situation worse.

2.26 pm

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): While I have the Floor, I am sure that colleagues across the House would like to congratulate pupils from West Lakes academy in my constituency on sending a balloon into space this morning—quite an achievement. It is called Project Space Eye if anyone would like to look it up.

As the Member of Parliament for England's most remotely accessible constituency from Westminster, I am proud to represent many dozens of farmers. As I have said previously when debating this issue, I married into a dairy farming family and, as such, I have some understanding of the wide impact that bovine tuberculosis can have. We have not seen much of this so far, but I hope that when the House discusses these issues we can prevent ourselves from descending into some of the crude, crass misunderstandings, clichés and characterisations about urban England and rural England that do nobody any good whatsoever.

Communities throughout my constituency were devastated by the outbreaks of foot and mouth over the past decade and, as a result, we are all acutely aware of the impact that losing a significant number of livestock can have, not only on the economic viability of farms, but also with regard to emotional distress caused by enforced slaughter. Bovine TB is extremely serious, and effective measures should be taken to minimise the spread of the disease. However, as more and more results of the badger cull are brought to light, the less and less effective it is shown to be. The badger cull has been a failure by whichever yardstick we choose to measure it, whether by its efficacy in reducing bovine TB, by the cost to the taxpayer, or by the humaneness of the implementation.

Before the pilot culls took place, the number of cattle slaughtered from January to November 2013 was 30,220. That means that more than 4,600 fewer cattle were slaughtered because of bovine TB compared with the same period in 2012. The widely disputed effectiveness of the cull

notwithstanding, other measures such as restrictions on cattle movement, tighter biosecurity and rigorous testing regimes have clearly had a great impact on reducing the need for compulsory slaughter. The pilot schemes were conducted on the basis that over six weeks, 70% of badgers would be culled. The original two pilot schemes failed in this regard. A freedom of

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information request in January revealed that in west Somerset just 360 badgers were killed by controlled shooting out of a population of more than 1,450, and in west Gloucestershire, 543 of about 2,350 badgers were killed. These numbers fall significantly below the 70% threshold. This has led to extensions of the culls, flying in the face of all sound scientific advice.

Professor Rosie Woodroffe, who was involved in the original randomised badger culling trials between 1998 and 2005, has said:

“It is not unreasonable to expect that as you prolong the cull and you prolong increased badger movement, you increase the detrimental effects.”

Those detrimental effects were incredibly serious and the result was that TB infections in badgers increased as movement increased, and the increase was exacerbated in areas where culling was prolonged. The badger cull was designed specifically to lower instances of bovine TB, but I am afraid that it is only this Government who could press ahead with a cull that is infecting more badgers.

Not only is this cull ineffective; it is cruel. The independent expert panel set up by the Government to assess the culls has confirmed that those carried out in Somerset and Gloucestershire were ineffective and failed on humanness. To be judged humane, no more than 5% of badgers would take longer than five minutes to die, but instead of meeting that one in 20 target, as many as one in five took longer than five minutes to die. With all that in mind, it is clear that controlled shooting badger culls are simply ineffective and it is appalling that the Government seek to carry on regardless.

The Government said the cull was needed to prevent bovine TB, which fell dramatically before the cull had even started. They said the cull would reduce TB infection rates, but more badgers are being infected owing to the prolonging of an ineffective cull. They said the cull would be humane, but significant numbers of badgers are being put through slow and painful deaths.

The contents of my postbag are a clear demonstration of how strongly my constituents feel about this badly implemented cull. The sheer amount of correspondence I have received so far on this issue has surpassed that received on many other issues, with the exception of the national health service, and not one constituent has expressed support for the cull. I am afraid it is time for the Government to go back to the drawing board and reflect the will of Members on both sides of the House.

2.31 pm

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): It will be with a heavy heart that I will not vote on this motion, if there is a Division. I really want to support the livestock industry and to demonstrate my commitment to eradicating this disease, but I am not prepared to vote on the basis of a partially leaked document—it was not even fully leaked—reported on the BBC news a couple of weeks ago.

I agree with and share the view of the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) that we should not seek to highlight an urban-rural divide, but it is disappointing that he referred to a number of alleged statistics from a report that none of us has had the benefit of seeing. How we can make a reasoned judgement on that, I do not know.

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Huw Irranca-Davies: The Minister has it.

Simon Hart: I have a huge amount of respect for the shadow Minister, as he knows. It is all very well for him to point at the Minister and say that he has it, but we cannot just look through a lengthy report in one morning or during a debate and reach a solid conclusion.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hart: Not at the moment, but I will in a short while.

This is a matter of great sensitivity. Although I have a long and well-known track record on this particular issue, I fully accept that not everybody shares my view and that there are some passionate contrary views. I respect them as much as I possibly can and I will—as I always have—study the alternative view.

We are talking not about a percentage reduction in bovine TB, but about how we best deal with eradication. I want to touch on two subjects: humaneness and the comparisons with the policy in Wales, which is being used as a nice, easy solution whereby people say, “Why don’t we just do what the Welsh are doing, because it seems to be working there?”

On humaneness, we have to take a view on whether culling is necessary. I accept entirely that not everybody takes that view, but if we accept that culling will play not the sole part, but a part in eradicating bovine TB, we have to look at the comparative measures available and the comparative suffering associated with each of them. There is no method of control or culling—none—that is without its welfare consequences. If anybody can highlight one, I will take an intervention. Even cage trapping comes with a welfare consequence—about which there is very little research—because animals may be trapped in those devices for a significant time before anybody deals with them. We have to make comparisons and reach a view. We have not done so and we are avoiding that particular aspect of the argument.

Only when we have looked at the comparative measures will we be able to address the whole subject in context. It is important to consider the suffering of cattle and badgers with TB, bearing in mind that a lot of cubs get infected while in the sett and are already carrying the disease by the time they emerge from it. Any vaccination after that is pointless, because they have already contracted the disease. We have to look at this practically. We also need to consider the suffering of farmers and the impact on their livelihood, which has been mentioned by pretty much every speaker. We also need to consider the suffering—I use that word carefully—of taxpayers who are, year in, year out, forking out substantial sums of money while we continue to dither over this subject.

On the comparison with Wales, I want to read out two quotes. The first is from the veterinary advice to the Welsh Government in 2011:

“A proactive, non-selective badger cull is expected to reduce the level of confirmed herd breakdowns within the culling area for year 1.”

The second is from the veterinary advice to the Welsh Government in 2012:

“In so far as the results of RBCT can be extrapolated to the IAA”—

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the intensive action area—

“it is possible to conclude that the outcome of an effectively managed cull of badgers (in the IAA) should be an overall reduction in the number of breakdowns.”

It is important to bear in mind that the only thing that has changed in Wales is the colour of the Government—the veterinary advice has not changed. It is essential that the House and others realise that the idea that some magic cure is being applied to the badger population in Wales is a myth. Anybody who suggests—as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), who is not in his place, did—that there is a substantial decline in the number of herd breakdowns in Wales as a result of vaccination needs to take a wee bit of care, because in fact the statistics demonstrate that the

reduction is exactly the same across the whole of Wales: there is no material difference between the reduction outside the vaccination area and that inside the vaccination area. The advice from the Welsh Government Minister, whom I spoke to personally, is that it would be dangerous to reach conclusions about the impact of vaccination based on the results so far. I just want to put that on the record.

As the Minister himself said:

“I am delighted that overall the figures have come down, however we cannot be certain that this is a long term trend and there may still be more fluctuation in the figures.”

Those who think that the answer lies in Wales should look again. We are a long way off being able to bring to the House news of a silver bullet having been invented and deployed in our part of the country.

It is important to allow other speakers to have their say. I mentioned at the beginning of my speech that the objective is eradication, not reduction. All the experts to whom I have spoken, including those in Cardiff representing Government and agricultural interests, recognise that a floor will be reached as a result of all the other measures that will be put in place, such as the measures on cattle movements and more rigorous annual testing. If we are to break through that floor and reach eradication rather than reduction, culling will be back on the agenda. Nobody of any political colour or persuasion when it comes to culling has not confirmed the fact that, if we are going to deal with the matter once and for all, we are going to have to address the reservoir of the disease in the wildlife population.

If one encouraging thing has come from today’s debate—I share the view of those Members who say that it is somewhat premature—it is the fact that at last one or two people are talking about a collaborative approach between parties, rather than simply using the issue as a means of political point scoring. If we can take an intelligent view and look at the best practice of the policy in Cardiff as well as some of the measures in England, I think we will make some progress. However, the idea that we can simply dismiss one important part of the strategy of reducing TB simply because we find it distasteful does not do badgers, cattle, farmers or taxpayers any favours.

2.38 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): I think we should judge the contribution of the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) by recalling his previous employment. He was employed by the

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Countryside Alliance and has long been an advocate of the tormenting of small mammals for fun—for sport. He was known in Wales for many years before he entered the House as a main advocate of killing small animals for fun. We should bear that in mind and consider the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) about our historic relationship with animals, particularly badgers. I hope to be able to quote part of John Clare’s poem.

The figures in Wales, which the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire did not cite, are impressive. There were reductions in the incidence of bovine TB as measured both by the number of cattle slaughtered, which fell by 33%, and the number of herds affected, which fell by 23%, but does he understand that enormous decrease was without any culling and without shooting badgers?

A wholly dishonest picture has been presented about Ireland. The Secretary of State compared reductions, but he compared last year with 1998. That was a strange year to pick, but the reason for it was the sudden very big rise in the number of incidents of bovine TB. It had been about half that level a year earlier, and it was reduced in following years. The significant point about Ireland, as has been suggested by the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), is clear when we

look at what has happened to the graph for Northern Ireland. The figures for reductions and increases in levels of bovine TB in the north and the south are virtually identical. There was a wholesale cull in the south—lots of animals were killed—but it made no difference in comparison with the figures for the north.

The report before us makes a very thin case. The Government and some Government Members say that we need another piece of paper or another report. We had 10 years of the Krebs study—it went on and on, with many millions of pounds spent and 10,000 animals slaughtered—which concluded that there was no advantage in culling in the United Kingdom. He said that as a result of the evidence. The Government praise themselves on believing in evidence-based policy, but when they do not have the evidence, they invent it, as they have today.

There is no evidence for a cull. When it was announced by the previous Secretary of State in 2011, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), I made the point that it was a bad science policy, and that there would be a big badger killing spree because of the indifference shown by people in the countryside to some animal suffering. An hon. Member made a plea for our treating cattle the same, but we should not give a picture of cattle having a blissful life—born in fields, running around in lovely surroundings, growing old, turning grey and geriatric, and going off to some nice residential home for ancient cows somewhere. Farming is brutal and cruel, and cattle have a brief life.

We must say to the overwhelming majority of people in this country who oppose the cull that there is a sensible solution, which is vaccination. It will not work perfectly, and we will have to look at it again and see how it works in other areas for a number of years. Let us not delude ourselves that those who support culling have anything except a wish to please the farmers whom they represent. That is fine, but DEFRA has become known by the name Do Everything Farmers' Representatives Ask, and I am afraid that there is a lot in that.

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That is the reason why we have ended up paying £3 billion—someone has said, “Let’s leave the common market. Let’s leave the EU”—of welfare into farmers’ pockets. If there is any dependency culture in this country, it is in farming. When there are problems in other industries, such as steel or heavy industries, they are not supported with unlimited subsidies. However, when there is a problem in the farming industry, it is given compensation for its losses. As someone has said about the floods, when the effluent hit the affluent there was a great reaction, and I am sure that the compensation will be a great deal more generous in the fields of Somerset than in the working-class areas and terraced streets that have been flooded for years. That is what we are up against today.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I will now finish. I believe that Opposition Members have compassion against cruelty, and we have practical alternatives to the Government’s instant solution, which does not work. John Clare’s great poem, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield, described what was acceptable in Britain at that time, with a badger dragged out of its area, paraded through the town, and beaten and kicked to death. That was regarded as a great sport, and some people in the Chamber still regard animals as suitable targets for sport or entertainment, but that is not what the majority of people want. If there is action to get rid of this disease, it must be based on science as well as what is compassionate and acceptable to the nation, which culling is not.

2.45 pm

Mr David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I do not want to provoke my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), but as a member of the Backbench Business Committee, I must tell him that I am delighted that we chose this subject for debate. I have enjoyed the debate, particularly its passion. It is such a shame that the passion demonstrated on animal welfare today has not been demonstrated on all such issues during the years that I have been in Parliament. If it

had been, we would have had a much better outcome for God's creatures than we now have. If I had been told when I spoke from the Back Benches on Third Reading of the Protection of Badgers Bill, which was piloted through by the noble Lord Waldegrave in 1992, that I would now be here to support the motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) about badger culling, I simply would not have believed it.

I do not want to antagonise any hon. Friends who represent farming communities—I am well aware of the pressures I face from my hon. Friends—but I am only too well aware that badgers are not warm cuddly creatures and that they can be dangerous when cornered. Some people claim that there are too many badgers and foxes, but that is a completely different matter and is not an argument for today's debate. I represent the urban area of Southend West. When I made that speech about protecting badgers many years ago, I had no idea how difficult it was to move a sett from an urban area to somewhere else.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con) *rose*—

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Mr Amess: Madam Deputy Speaker has given the impression that she does not welcome interventions, so I will continue. *[Interruption.]* I give way.

Daniel Kawczynski: My hon. Friend mentioned that he represents an urban area. Will he agree to come to Shropshire to meet our dairy farmers, because he will see that we have slaughtered more cows this year than last year—up to 2,125—and that the misery for our farmers is absolutely palpable?

Mr Amess: I am trying to keep within my eight or nine minutes, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is like when I expressed my views on the city of culture and had offers to visit constituencies all over the country. If I can, I may at some time visit my hon. Friend's constituency. When I represented Basildon, which had 32 farms, I gained some understanding of the pressures that farmers are under.

All hon. Members probably have the same briefings—depending on which side of the debate we are on—and many of the arguments have already been made. There have been two culls, and we now face a decision about the way forward. I will not get into the argument about the expert panel's report, but it has apparently found that pilot culls have failed in the two tests set by the Government, namely effectiveness and humaneness. Many hon. Members have made points about that, so I will not repeat them.

Different parts of the world have been mentioned, so I will say that badgers are a unique species. When comparisons are made with possum culls in New Zealand, or with culls in north America, they do not take into account the unique culture of the species. It is like comparing a dog with a whale. I just do not think that those comparisons are real.

The pilot culls, as well as seemingly being ineffective, were very costly. The costs of conducting and monitoring the target culls soared, especially when the policing costs are taken into account. That was big expense. The preliminary calculations put the cost of the pilot cull at more than £4,000 per badger killed. That is absolutely crazy. It has been estimated that £10 million has been spent on the cull so far. We live in challenging economic times and that is a lot of money.

The evidence suggests that the adoption of free-shooting as a means of culling badgers did not meet the necessary guidelines on humaneness. DEFRA set the standard of 95% of badgers dying within five minutes. However, as we have heard, the independent experts found that up to 18% of the badgers exceeded that limit. According to Natural England, badgers were often shot in the wrong area of the body, necessitating a second shot to kill them. The monitoring of the culls has been deemed “woefully inadequate”. On the 41 visits made by Natural England's monitors, they witnessed only nine badgers being killed by controlled shooting.

It would be wrong to highlight the concerns without putting forward a solution, which is what all hon. Members want. I think that badger vaccination should be treated seriously. Using an already

licensed injectable vaccine represents a more cost-effective, compassionate and less divisive way of managing infection in badger populations. The House is saying that it would be good if we could agree on this matter. That solution could be implemented by using the data that have been provided

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by Natural England, which has recorded accurate information on the location of badger setts. I argue that badger setts could be successfully inoculated by using that information.

The speed of vaccination is an important consideration. It would be disingenuous to suggest that vaccination is a quick process. Admittedly, the process would be gradual. However, vaccinating badgers is a long-term and sustainable way of reducing the prevalence of bovine TB. That is what the House is coming together to say. It wants to see the prevalence of bovine TB reduced.

Obviously, inoculation will not eradicate badgers that carry the disease. It will just prevent the disease from spreading to other badgers. Therefore, those who are in favour of the badger cull may well argue that, on the face of it, the cull brings a quicker resolution to the problem. However, the evidence suggests that if we want a long-term, sustainable resolution to the problem, culling is not the answer. There is no doubt that badgers contribute to the problem of TB in cattle. My hon. Friends who have represented the concerns of their constituents have been right to do so. However, the only way to manage the problem is to vaccinate badgers. I will not comment on matters in Wales.

I want to make one or two remarks to the Minister. I commend the Government's investment of £250,000 a year to support and encourage badger vaccination using the existing injectable BCG vaccine. I also commend the Department for continuing to invest in further research into cattle vaccination and for pressing our European partners to reform EU legislation, which will be a tough task.

Finally, it is important to note that the fact that they oppose the method that was adopted in the recent culls does not mean that those who champion vaccination as an alternative are not on the side of farmers or that they do not empathise with the emotional and financial implications of losing cattle to TB. The evidence is that we can make a serious attempt to reduce the levels of TB in farmers' livestock, while upholding the welfare of these unique animals. I urge the Minister to seriously review the evidence from the IEP and to consider a more effective, compassionate and less costly alternative that serves the interests of farmers, as well as meeting ethical standards. Today, hon. Members have clearly demonstrated their general concern about animal welfare.

2.55 pm

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) on securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee on allowing it to proceed.

It is important that we acknowledge that the badger cull has been a catastrophic failure. It has failed farmers, it has failed taxpayers and it has failed the wildlife in our countryside. It failed to reach the 70% target that it needed to reach to be effective. As Members have said, the experts say that for a randomised badger cull to be successful, it should take about two weeks. The Government set a timescale of six weeks, but they did not even manage it in that period and had to extend it. It certainly failed on that score.

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The cull failed DEFRA's own perverse humaneness test. The test says that it is humane if it takes an animal only five minutes to die. I do not think that that is humane, but the Government failed that test as well. As other Members have pointed out, according to leaked reports, one in five badgers took considerably longer than five minutes to die. Of the 1,861 badgers that were killed in the cull, 335 took considerably longer than five minutes to die. The Government therefore failed the humaneness test.

The Government failed to stop the spread of the disease because of perturbation. All the expert evidence says that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) said in her intervention, the Secretary of State himself acknowledged that the 70% target must be met, otherwise the cull would be a failure because of the problem of perturbation. The Government did not manage that, so on that basis, they have made the situation worse and spread TB even wider.

The Government have failed the value-for-money test as well. The Conservative think-tank, the Bow Group, has said that it cost £4,121 to kill each badger.

The Government have failed to acknowledge that vaccination works. They have failed to acknowledge what has happened in Wales. They have failed to accept that in Northern Ireland, where there has been no badger cull, the level of bovine TB has been reduced. We know that it is cattle movements and biosecurity measures, alongside vaccination, that will make the biggest contribution.

The Government have also failed to meet their commitments. Government Members have talked today about seeking cross-party consensus. The Government have failed to seek that consensus. The Opposition have offered an open hand to find a consensus. Hopefully, after today, we will find one, but the Government have so far failed to deliver on that.

The Government have certainly failed to listen to the public. Some 304,202 people signed the e-petition against the badger cull. The Government have failed to listen to scientific opinion, as I have pointed out. The hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), who is not in his place, spoke about the importance of proceeding on the basis of scientific evidence and said that we needed to wait for the report to be available. The overwhelming scientific consensus before the cull was that it would not work, but the Government felt that it was satisfactory to ignore scientific opinion. When it suits them they ignore scientific opinion, and when it does not they call for more scientific evidence to be made available.

Ministers cannot say that they were not made aware that the badger cull would be a disaster: hon. Members lined up to point out the folly of proceeding with it; the scientific world told them not to cull and that there was no scientific basis for proceeding with it; and the public were overwhelmingly opposed to it. The Government's own former scientific adviser said it was a fiasco, and many other choice words have been used by scientists to describe it.

It is important that from today we move forward with some sort of unity and consensus. I am delighted that some Members who previously voted for the cull have now changed their minds in the light of the catastrophe that has befallen us in the randomised badger culling areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and

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Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) talked about the importance of reaching a consensus, which is what the overwhelming majority of the British public want. We know that the current situation is putting the police in an impossible position. I have heard numerous reports—even while I have been sitting here listening to the debate, people have been e-mailing me—of those monitoring badger culls being harassed and even having shots fired at them. We cannot allow that to happen. We have to find an alternative way forward.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Would the hon. Gentleman mind looking at whether there is a difference in the policing costs for Gloucestershire and Somerset?

Chris Williamson: Policing costs are a significant contributory factor to the overall cost of the badger cull, but we live in a democracy and people have a right to monitor the badger cull and protest against it. We do not live in a dictatorship and those costs have to be factored in.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Is it not important to acknowledge the distress the cull has caused to the wider community overall?

Chris Williamson: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. That distress is not confined to people living in towns and cities; it is felt by rural communities and by many farmers. Dairy farmers have approached me to say that they are extremely distressed by the badger cull and do not feel that there is any justification for it. I see the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) shaking his head, but I can assure him that that is a fact. They are fearful that this folly will make matters worse for them. They want to proceed on a scientific basis and see this disease eradicated. They do not want to see badgers suffering and they certainly do not want to see the situation made worse as a consequence of the folly we have seen so far.

I hope that there can be a rapprochement between those on the Government Front Bench and Opposition Members, and that we can find consensus. To achieve that, the Government must abandon this cull.

3.2 pm

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): For the avoidance of doubt, I declare an interest. I am responsible for some cattle in Wales and although this debate refers to England it is appropriate that I declare that interest.

In a few months I will no longer have an interest to declare because we have decided not to keep cattle any more, partly as a result of the problems we face with TB in cattle. More grassland will be therefore ploughed up and the countryside will be less attractive. With the loss of biodiversity, the countryside will be able to support fewer species. That is a shame, and is just one effect of this country not being able to get a grip and reduce, then eliminate, this disease.

I congratulate the Backbench Business Committee on allowing this debate and the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) on securing it. It is vital that, in our shared determination to beat this terrible disease, we constantly scrutinise the work of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the

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development of policy. I am sure the House shares my determination to bring down the incidence of TB in our national beef and dairy herds. It is a great burden on our cattle farmers, and an avoidable expense to the Government and the taxpayer. It is also a possible risk to human health, but I do not think I will have time to go into that this afternoon.

The tragedy is that bovine TB was virtually eliminated in the United Kingdom during the 1950s and 1960s, although there were persistent outbreaks in the south-west. That success was due to the tuberculin skin test. When the disease began to increase and spread from the south-west, it was reasonably believed that it could again be controlled by means of the skin test, perhaps used more frequently. Unfortunately, that was not the case. There is now a wildlife reservoir that did not exist in the 1950s and 1960s. The scenario is different, and therefore different policies are needed to prevent the ever-increasing spread of the disease.

Although the epidemiology of TB, whether in cattle or in human beings, is not readily understandable—for instance, infected cattle kept in sheds throughout the winter have not passed on the infection to other cattle with which they have been in close contact—it is sometimes useful to draw parallels between different species. Bronllys hospital, in my constituency, is now a community hospital that is much valued by the people whom it serves, but originally it was the TB sanatorium for the people of south Wales. It was built in my constituency because we have a sunny and healthy climate. The treatment in the hospital of TB before antibiotics consisted of radical surgery, fresh air, sunshine and good food. The success of the eradication, or near-eradication, of TB in humans has been due to the use of antibiotics, the use of a vaccine, the pasteurisation of milk—which often carried the organism—improvements in housing and diet, and, nowadays, health checks for people entering the country,

Mr Jim Cunningham: What the hon. Gentleman is saying is very interesting. Is he going to say anything about the effects of the vaccine when it was used in Wales? I referred to Scotland earlier, but I meant to say Wales.

Roger Williams: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that correction. I shall come to the issue he has raised in a moment.

We would not have eradicated TB in human beings if we had relied on the vaccine alone, and indeed we will not eradicate it in cattle if we rely on the vaccine alone. A range of tools must be used if we are to be successful. There is the tuberculin skin test, there is biosecurity, there is the restriction of cattle movements, and now there is vaccination. There is also badger culling in specific, focused areas where the incidence of the disease is high. I do not underestimate the contribution that a badger vaccine could make to the control of TB in cattle, but it cannot be relied on to achieve it on its own.

The problem is that we have no scientific evidence that the Bacille de Calmette et Guérin, or BCG—which was developed in the 1920s, and has not been developed further—can prevent TB in cattle. We know that it is 70% effective in providing immunity in badgers, although of course it is not effective if the badgers are already infected, but no scientific evidence has been produced to demonstrate that it reduces infection in cattle in the field.

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The pilot culls are planned to continue for four years. I believe that they should continue, and that lessons should be learnt from the report that we expect to be published in the next few weeks. We should bear it in mind that the randomised badger cull trials failed to meet the cull targets—which is the point I was trying to make to the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), for whom I have high regard—but the cull trials did result in a reduced incidence of TB in cattle herds, so there is some good news.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman not share my concern that whatever we think about the issue of culling, there has to be huge concern about the failure to meet DEFRA's own targets on humaneness? Surely we cannot continue to extend this culling regime while this inhumaneness continues?

Roger Williams: We await the report on that. We have had only leaked evidence and I have heard less critical interpretation of the statistics.

Angela Smith *rose*—

Clive Efford *rose*—

Roger Williams: I will not give way as I have almost used up my time allowance.

Continuing results from the RBCTs show continuing benefits from proactive culling many years after the conclusion of the trials. The TB situation continues to improve in New Zealand and Australia. Improvements are also evident in southern Ireland where, the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge might like to note, a reactive cull has been used. Surprisingly, those areas that used reactive culling in the RBCTs now show improvements compared with the survey areas. Perhaps we should re-examine the use of reactive culling.

More support for culling could be generated if we had a better test for TB in live badgers. The good news is that the polymerase chain reaction test is making progress and hopefully by next year we will have a conclusive test. I am sure that the culling of infected setts, as identified by PCR tests, and the protecting of healthy setts would be supported. I ask the Minister whether there is any advance on those tests.

I am told that badgers culled in the pilots vary in weight from 6.5 kg to 22 kg. Evidence of disease in the lightest badgers probably implies that they would not survive the winter and would die in considerable distress of starvation, hyperthermia and disease. I have not heard anything today that

would lead me to believe that the BCG vaccine alone will lead to an elimination of disease in the wildlife reservoir. I believe a cull is also needed as part of a wide-ranging policy, and for that reason I cannot support this motion.

3.12 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I apologise for not being here at the start of the debate.

Along with a number of colleagues on both sides of the House, I am not an expert on this subject, but I was Minister of State at DEFRA between 2009 and 2010.

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Some might say that that disqualifies me as an expert, but, as everybody in the House knows, having no skill, qualifications or even talent has never been an obstacle to being a Minister—I am sure we all have our own favourites. However, I did have the experience of being at DEFRA the last time the Labour Government looked at another cull—we did cull between 1997 and 2010—and, as many colleagues on both sides of the House have said, the Krebs report demonstrated that the science was brought into question.

When I was appointed as Minister the *Daily Mail* attacked me. It said, “He’s a veggie and he’s a townie; what does he know about farming?”, which was a very fair observation, but I thought just a little bit too critical, because, as I have said, lack of qualifications has never been an obstacle before. The National Farmers Union was very generous, however. It said, “We don’t care where he comes from or what he eats; we will judge him on what he does for farming”, and I think I established a good relationship with the NFU. In its defence, in response to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) about subsidies, if there were not subsidies for agriculture across Europe there would be a lot more people visiting food banks. Those subsidies are not going to line farmers’ pockets exclusively, which I think is the interpretation of what was said that people outside the Chamber might have drawn.

The hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), who is not in his place at present, was very critical of the previous Labour Government. His comments might have been fair if he had said the Labour Government were inconsistent, but that inconsistency arose because we tried to do everything we could: we tried culling; we tried restrictions; we tried extra biosecurity; and we tried vaccination—with all the problems the Government have in getting the vaccination validated by Europe and so forth. Progress was made, however.

I attended the NFU conference in Birmingham only two weeks ago, as did other members of the EFRA Select Committee. The Minister was also there, representing the Government on behalf of the Secretary of State. I have the highest regard for the outgoing NFU president, Peter Kendall, and I wish his successor, Meurig Raymond, every success during his tenure as president. I heard Peter Kendall say to the Minister that the NFU was grateful for the Government’s efforts to deal with TB.

When I was a Minister, from 2009 to 2010, we were presented with evidence to secure a cull. Some Labour colleagues have suggested today that the evidence is overwhelming, but it was not overwhelming in 2009. At that time, I took the view, on a balance of 55:45, not to recommend culling to the then Secretary of State. He looked at the evidence, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmere (Huw Irranca-Davies), who was also in the Department at the time, was privy to some of our discussions. The Secretary of State listened to the experts, read the briefings, looked at my recommendations and talked to the NFU. He also concluded that culling was not the way forward.

Angela Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I was named in the previous speech, but the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Roger Williams) would not give way to me. He said in his speech that targets had been set for the randomised badger culling

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trial. Can my hon. Friend confirm that such targets were not set for the RBCT, and that the trials were in fact designed to establish what targets would be necessary for culling to be effective?

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend has set the record straight following the hon. Gentleman's comments. I also congratulate her and others on securing the debate today, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing it. Although it is taking place in advance of the report's release, it represents another step forward in our attempt to address the problem of TB. I hope that we will get an oral statement from the Secretary of State when the report is published, and that we will be able to have a full debate on the Floor of the House in Government time.

Clive Efford: Many Members prayed in aid the fact that the report was delivered to the Secretary of State only today, and suggested that the debate was therefore premature. Does my hon. Friend agree that debates in the House can often focus the attention of those outside the House? Perhaps it is no coincidence that the report was produced on the same day that we are holding this debate. That is testimony to the work of the Backbench Business Committee in arranging the debate for today.

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. One of the successes of the Backbench Business Committee's procedures is that they have allowed Parliament to chivvy the Government along. For DEFRA, that has happened in relation to dangerous dogs, wild animals in circuses and bovine TB. The debates keep these matters alive in the eyes of the media, of the public and of those on all sides who are concerned about the issues. It is certainly not a waste of time to hold this debate today. It might be premature to do so before we have seen the report, but I hope that the Government will hold a debate in their own time when it is published, or that we will at least have an oral statement so that we can question the Secretary of State about its findings.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire has suggested that the report has been quoted selectively. He even quoted some statistics from it himself. Some of it is in the public domain. As soon as all of it is there, it will provide more evidence and give us more opportunities to make judgments. We have heard about the conflicting interpretations of what is happening in Wales, Ireland and Northern Ireland. I have not heard anything so far to persuade me that we arrived at the wrong conclusion in 2009-10.

I understand the total frustration and anger among those in the farming community. They want to see something being done about bovine TB, and the cull at least provided evidence that something was being done. I still think that it was the wrong thing to do, however, and I hope that the Government will not extend the culls in due course. In the speeches from both sides of the House today, no one has said anything other than that they want TB to be eradicated. We want it to be done as efficiently, professionally and quickly as possible. I have the utmost respect for the Minister; we have dealt with each other on many occasions, and I know that he is committed to this subject as a result of his own farming and family interests. We want bovine TB to be beaten as quickly as possible, and I hope that this debate will bring us closer to achieving that as soon as possible.

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3.19 pm

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick). I start by paying my own tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) for making it to the debate today. She is incredibly brave to do so. I am also grateful to her for doing so because she had asked me to open the debate on her behalf, had she been unable to be here. I thank the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), not only for her contribution today, but for all her work on the issue over a number of months now. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing us to have the debate. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is a timely one and a good opportunity for us to focus our minds on the issue.

We need to take the debate back to basics. There has been much criticism from those who have been

pro the cull that those of us who are anti the cull do not understand, because we do not have bovine TB in our constituencies. I am one of those MPs: we have very little BTB in Kent—but I want to keep it that way, which is why I am against the cull. I fear that the pilot culls will show that they spread the disease wider. I have spoken to my own farmers, who initially expressed disappointment with my position, but I said to them, “I don’t want to see this nasty disease in Kent. My fear is that if we continue to go down this route, that is exactly what will happen.”

The subject is emotive, as we have seen today. Everyone has spoken passionately, but it is important to stick to the facts. The debate is about how the current situation stands and about how we best move forward to eradicate bovine TB from our cattle.

Daniel Kawczynski: My hon. Friend says that she has been talking to her farmers in Kent. How much time has she spent talking to farmers in places such as Shropshire, who have been badly affected by bovine TB, to listen to their perspective?

Tracey Crouch: I have not come to this conclusion lightly. My hon. Friend might recall that when I first spoke on the issue in this House I had initially been in favour of the cull, because I thought that it was the right way to support farmers. Having looked at the facts and read the science, I completely changed my mind. I do not come to this on an emotional basis; I decided about it after reading the initial scientific reports that have been published.

I am enormously sympathetic, as is everyone in the House, to the farmers who have lost otherwise healthy cattle, because they have been compulsorily slaughtered as a consequence of bovine TB. The impact on farmers can be devastating financially and mentally. In England alone, the disease has cost the taxpayer £500 million in the past decade. I wholeheartedly support the Government’s belief that it must be tackled, for the benefit of farmers and for the animals that contract this awful disease. Today, however, we are here specifically to discuss the badger cull and whether it is the correct method of tackling the disease.

We need to remember that badgers are not the only transmitters of bovine TB. Cattle and other animals spread the disease as much, if not more, than badgers.

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Yet, despite strong opposition in this House, two pilot badger culls have taken place, one in Somerset and one in Gloucestershire. The purpose of the pilots was simply to test controlled shooting as a method for culling. The Government decided that it must be tested against three criteria—effectiveness, humaneness and safety—in order to determine whether the method would be successful and whether it should be rolled out more widely and implemented as the policy to eradicate bovine TB.

It took a leak from the IEP for people to find out precisely what the Government’s measure of humaneness was. It was defined as whether a badger died within five minutes of being shot. The leaked IEP findings outlined that up to 18% of culled badgers took longer than five minutes to die, failing the test for humaneness. I am interested to know whether the published report will have those same figures in it, but we will wait and see. In addition, Natural England released a set of compliance reports that show some badgers were shot in the wrong body area, or were wounded and had to be shot a second time. Other badgers have been found outside the cull area with atrocious fatal injuries, but, to be fair, we do not know if they were shot by licensed marksmen or by those taking matters into their own hands. We have to be careful about some of the details suggested by some groups, which are nevertheless rightly concerned about the cull. On the first of the Government’s own criteria, however, the cull has failed. Those with genuine concerns about animal welfare are right to be upset by the findings in the leaked report.

I must stress that this is not only an animal welfare issue, however, and that leads me to the second of the criteria—effectiveness. Even after significant downward revision of estimated badger population numbers and the pilot culling periods being extended, the target of a minimum 70%

reduction in badger numbers—needed to slow the forecasted rise of bovine TB by a mere 12% to 16%—was not achieved in either pilot area. In Somerset, the central population estimate was revised down from 2,490 to 1,450 badgers and the six-week maximum period was extended to nine weeks. In Gloucestershire, the population estimates were revised down from 3,400 to 2,350 badgers and the six-week maximum period was extended to just over 11 weeks. Initial estimates suggested that in Somerset 59% of the revised estimate of badger population were shot, a total of 940 badgers. In Gloucestershire, a lower figure of 30% was initially suggested, totalling 921 badgers. The leaked IEP report has revised the Somerset figure down further to 50%,

By removing fewer than the target number of badgers over an extended period, the pilot culls have deviated widely from the conditions of the RBCT, which determined the minimum percentage that needed to be culled to ensure it would be effective. That does not even take into consideration the effects of perturbation. The social structure of badgers means that when disturbed in this way, they are likely to flee outside the areas they would otherwise stay within, thus increasing the number of animals at risk of infection. It is likely that the pilot culls will have seriously perturbed the remaining badger populations in the two cull zones, which in turn could lead to an increase in the prevalence of bovine TB among the remaining badgers and a subsequent increase in the risk to cattle. The lower the percentage reached, the larger the effects of that. So not only have the

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Government failed to achieve the second part of their criteria, but they have quite possibly worsened the problem through perturbation.

Leaving aside the additional policing costs incurred, which appear to be substantial, I believe that although there are minor concerns about the safety, there is, on the whole, no issue with that criterion being met. However, despite the Secretary of State's premature declaration to the House last year that the pilots were a success and that all three criteria have been met, it appears that that is not the case and that only one was.

There is a viable alternative that has been proved to be effective, that is humane and costs less, with no unforeseen astronomical policing costs to be incurred: a vaccination programme combined with better biosecurity, and stricter testing and movements of cattle, as is currently being undertaken in Wales, with great results. In further support of that method, I looked back to our previous successes with tackling bovine TB. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Roger Williams) made the point that in the 1960s TB in cattle was brought under control using a strict and very high level of cattle testing, movement restrictions and biosecurity measures. Only when those measures were relaxed and then abandoned altogether did incidences increase again. Surely that is the appropriate way to bring cattle TB under control while we await a useable cattle vaccine.

A licensed injectable vaccine for badgers presents practical challenges in its administration, but it has been shown to be extremely effective, reducing the risk of becoming infected with bovine TB by 76%. Additionally, and importantly, it has a herding effect, which means that when more than a third of the social group has been vaccinated, the risk to unvaccinated cubs was reduced by 79%, as a 2012 study shows. Vaccinations not only have the potential to reduce the risk of vaccinated animals and their unvaccinated cubs becoming infected, but they eliminate the problem of perturbation and animal welfare concerns.

In conclusion, the pilots were an experiment to find an effective method for dealing with bovine TB. What is the point of doing an experiment if we are going to continue regardless of the results? The test has shown culling to be inhumane and ineffective, so I urge the Minister to reconsider the policy of culling and move forward with a more effective method, as has been done in Wales. However, if he intends to go ahead with the cull, he must prove he has the support of the House by bringing forward a motion in the name of the Government and giving Members the opportunity to vote for or against his policy, based not on emotion but on evidence, which he knows shows the culls to be the shower that many of us warned they would be.

3.29 pm

Mr Iain McKenzie (Inverclyde) (Lab): I do not intend to use up all the time available to me, as I have contributed to the previous two debates on these pilot culls and I fear that I would just be repeating some of the points I raised before the pilots started and while they were taking place.

I know the Minister to be an honourable gentleman, and I have served with him on the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I hope and expect that he is listening intently, and that he will take to his

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colleagues in government the consensus of the House that these culls have to stop permanently, and that we must look in another direction to solve the problem, particularly as the badger cull is now recognised as a pretty shambolic failure by the public and everyone concerned with it.

We have heard from colleagues about the pilots' failings as regards humaneness and effectiveness. Two thousand badgers have been killed and millions of pounds have been spent. We have heard of the division in communities and the public over the issue. I welcomed the announcement that badger culls had been stopped after it was evidenced that marksmen had failed to meet the 70% kill mark, but unbelievably the Government are still considering rolling out the policy of culling badgers in 10 new areas of England next year. The Government need to cancel these killing plans once and for all, and to focus on improving cattle welfare, controlling cattle movements, increasing biosecurity, and developing, as hon. Members have said, a badger and cattle vaccine.

It has been rumoured that the Government are considering even cheaper methods of dealing with badgers, such as gassing them. I hope that the Minister can confirm that that is just a rumour and is not being considered. We need a science-led policy to manage cattle movements better, and a vaccine to tackle TB in cattle. Opposition Members have warned the Government for two years that the badger cull was bad for farmers, bad for taxpayers and bad for wildlife. We recognise that bovine TB is a terrible disease and, hopefully, those of us who do not come from a farming community understand the frustration of farmers in those communities that feel the devastating impacts of bovine TB. However, the cull has not helped to resolve this problem. Farmers and the public have been falsely presented with the impression that without the large-scale killing of badgers, bovine tuberculosis in cattle cannot be effectively controlled. As we have heard, that is not the case, if we accept evidence from Wales: in 2013, a programme involving badger vaccination, stricter cattle testing and movement restrictions showed that we can get a very significant reduction in bovine TB incidence in cattle without the need for a cull.

Culling just does not work. It risks spreading the disease further and costs far more than it saves. The Government claim that any badger culling policy will be proceeded with only if it can be demonstrated that it is humane. However, as I have said, it has been well and truly evidenced that the culling has not been humane. It did not even meet the target that the Government set. Unfortunately, DEFRA has hidden behind the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, claiming that the disclosure of information would risk the safety of personnel involved in the pilots and compromise its ability to protect the environment. It continues to do that in spite of the Information Commissioner's ruling that there should be disclosure, and the fact that the pilot culls have been completed.

If the Minister truly wishes to pursue a cross-party approach to this issue, why has he not agreed to any of Labour's key asks, put forward in the Westminster Hall debate of 11 December last year, in which I took part? All of them were reasonable, rational, and had cross-party support, unlike the cull. We have heard from Members on both sides of the House that we need to move with urgency on getting a vaccine solution.

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Badger vaccination represents a less risky and potentially more successful method of reducing the

prevalence of bovine TB among badger populations. Labour is committed to implementing a science-led strategy in the fight to reduce bovine TB; that includes the use of vaccination. DEFRA is working with the EU to change legislation so as to allow TB vaccination of cattle, and the use of a trade test to differentiate infected from vaccinated animals.

The Government have continually said that a vaccine is not ready. Could that be the result of one of the Government's first acts in 2010—cancelling five of the six vaccine field trials commissioned by Labour? DEFRA is cutting funding for the research and development of a badger vaccine from £3 million to just over £300,000 by next year. It has also cut funding for developing a cattle vaccine by over £1.5 million. We have had a cut in vaccine development and a farce of a cull, both of which have been bad for farmers, bad for taxpayers and bad for wildlife.

3.35 pm

Mr Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): As a Member of Parliament for a constituency in Devon, I am well aware of just how devastating bovine tuberculosis is in cattle. It is the area of the country that has been most affected by this terrible scourge over a number of years. I do not represent many farmers, but I have had farmers come to my advice surgery telling me about the devastation of their herd. I am acutely aware of the devastation that that causes to their families and to farming communities, and we are all united in wanting to do something about it.

The IEP report, much of which is on the web for hon. Members to see, clearly states that culling is not suitable for preventing the spread of bovine TB. Instead, we should stick to the agreement, made at the beginning of the coalition, to fully consider the scientific evidence available before deciding on the best way forward.

The IEP reported that the pilot cull has not met two of the three criteria. The culls have failed to be humane, as up to 18% of the badgers killed took longer than five minutes to die, and have failed to be effective, as less than 50% of the badgers were killed in either pilot area, far less than the target of 70% for the trial. The report shows that the recent badger culls did not work and suggests that they have had a negative effect by encouraging the spread of the disease through movement of badgers as badger populations are disrupted.

As the randomised badger culling trial, managed by the independent scientific group between 1998 and 2006, witnessed, after killing more than 12,000 badgers there was an initial decrease in the level of disease by approximately 23% in the centre of culled areas, but an increase of 29% on neighbouring land. By continuing with a badger cull we are in danger of worsening levels of infection, and therefore we must carefully consider the viable alternatives to a cull.

Evidence from Wales, as highlighted by other hon. Members, shows that in 2013 a programme of badger vaccination, stricter cattle testing and movement restrictions, resulted in a 24% fall in the number of herds with bovine TB, compared with England where they fell by only 3%. Those options are realistic alternatives to a badger cull to prevent the spread of bovine TB.

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Testing regimes in England need to be improved. Currently, a significant proportion of infected cattle are missed, so there is still a great threat that the disease will spread whether or not we continue to cull badgers. As DEFRA has recognised, the single intradermal comparative cervical tuberculin test can miss up to approximately 20% of infected animals that are either in the early or late stages of the disease. By using this means of testing, it is possible that infected animals can be present in a herd when movement restrictions are lifted and the officially tuberculosis-free status regained, even though herds may be infected.

Between the late 1980s and 2005, various changes to the testing regime led to a re-establishment of the disease due to major reductions in testing intensity, relaxation in movement controls, and a move to two, three and four-yearly testing, which fails effectively to identify and isolate cases of the

disease. The testing regime can have an important effect on the level of bovine TB in cattle. For instance, after moving to annual testing in 2008, Wales has nearly halved the number of cattle slaughtered per annum since 2009. Without such a regime we run the risk of jeopardising any further work to reduce bovine TB. Beyond this, a better testing regime can be supplemented by improving methods of biosecurity, which includes area-to-area cattle movement controls and annual checks, as well as preventive vaccinations.

Attempts in the '50s, '60s and '70s to reduce the levels of the disease through a process of rigorous area-by-area cattle movement controls and annual testing decreased levels of bovine TB to 0.01%. Those alternatives had a dramatic effect on the number of livestock slaughtered, which decreased from 25,000 in 1950 to 2,081 in 1970, without resorting to the slaughter of wildlife. The research of the Central Science Laboratory further concluded that suggested biosecurity exclusion methods could be up to 100% effective if used by farmers to prevent the transmission of bovine TB from badgers to cattle.

It seems peculiar that we could be paying to cull badgers, which causes an increase in the spread of bovine TB, before we have ensured that the biosecurity resources, which could only have a positive effect, are sufficient. That option is particularly appealing as DEFRA data suggest that the average cost of improving biosecurity for farmers is about £4,000. Considering the fact that the average cost of dealing with a TB herd breakdown in Great Britain is about £27,000, such measures would appear cost-effective when compared with the cost of a cull, which DEFRA estimates at £4.56 million a cull with an extra policing cost of £500,000 per area per year.

The cull is not the financially viable option and although it has been argued that vaccination options are too expensive to be efficient, that is not true. In fact, DEFRA has estimated the cost of vaccinating badgers at £2,250 per sq km a year whereas the cost of policing the first two badger culls was roughly £4,400 per sq km. Vaccination is cheaper because there is no need to dispose of carcasses, it is unlikely to require as much policing and wildlife organisations have hundreds of volunteers who can be used as a resource to help with its administration.

Over the past 10 years, DEFRA has spent £10 million on research into badger vaccines and it appears a great waste of taxpayers' money for the Government to drop

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that potential alternative. More than 1,200 badgers have so far been vaccinated in Gloucester and the Welsh Assembly Government continue to pursue a vaccination policy for their intensive action area in and around Pembrokeshire, the cost of which is estimated at £662 a badger. Although that cost is high, it is considerably lower than the estimates for the cost of the pilot culls on a per badger basis, so the UK Government should be considering the option seriously. The alternatives exist and are a realistic option to prevent the transmission of bovine TB.

In conclusion, as the IEP report has shown, culling is ineffective and inhumane. It appears completely wrong to jeopardise the welfare of badgers and taxpayers' money when cheaper options are available to prevent this terrible TB infection in cattle.

3.42 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for the debate and the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) for her work in securing it. Like others, I appreciate her courage in leading it this afternoon.

Let me start by echoing the words of the hon. Member for Southend West (Mr Amess), who is no longer in his place. The debate is not about people who love badgers versus people who love cattle. It is not about those who find a cull distasteful, to use the words of the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), versus those who do not. It is about how we can most effectively address the scourge of bovine TB.

The science points us towards the fact that culling badgers in England is not an effective policy. I wish that the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) were still in his place, because I would say to him that it is him, not me, who has his science wrong. I might also be tempted to point out to him that although I know I am guilty of many sins, I am not aware that I have been guilty of spreading bovine TB myself. That was among the many things he accused me of earlier this afternoon.

Let me be serious. It is important that we address the clichés. Even though I represent an urban constituency, I have spent a lot of time with farmers. I was a member of a European Parliament special committee on foot and mouth disease and I visited many farms and sat with many farmers in their kitchens. I am under no illusion about the enormous distress they experience at the thought of the destruction of their animals. I have cried as they have cried facing the loss both of their livelihoods and of animals that they love. This is not a competition about who loves animals most; it is a debate about the evidence for what works. There is no monopoly on either side of the House on caring for animals. What there is, I think, is a determination among some of us to try to look at the evidence with a bit more rigour.

I welcome this debate, because it is important that MPs are properly involved in any future decisions about the control of bovine TB, and that those decisions are subject to a vote in this House. As other hon. Members have indicated, the pilot badger cull can only be judged a spectacular failure, including against the Government's own terms of reference.

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The leaked IEP report makes it clear that the pilot failed two of the Government's tests. It failed on humaneness, as more than 5% of badgers took longer than five minutes to die, and it failed on effectiveness, as fewer than 50% of badgers have been killed in either pilot area. Yes, those are only leaks, but we know that they echo the empirical evidence of so many people who have been monitoring the culls. We know, for example, that one of those culls took more than 11 weeks and that people involved in those culls stopped free shooting quite early on because it was not effective. We know as well from the people who were following those culls that many of the animals were not shot in a clean way.

It is not the case that, because this report has not been published, we cannot make statements about it. I wish, as others do, that the Minister had brought it forward earlier. As one of the co-sponsors of the debate, I can say that, when we went to the Backbench Business Committee, we fully expected the report to be out. The reason we wanted it out fairly swiftly was that we know that this Government have a habit of moving fast without consulting Parliament. They did that when they extended the culls in the first place—the extended period did not come back to Parliament for a decision—so it was right to ensure that the Government heard the views of the constituents whom we represent.

The leaked IEP report makes it clear not only that the pilots failed some of the tests that the Government set, but that costs have soared, particularly when policing costs are taken into account. Preliminary estimates put the pilot costs at an eye-watering £4,000 per badger killed. Shockingly, despite that, the Government have refused to rule out the extension of culling in up to 40 additional large areas in the west and south-west of England in the coming years.

Much has been said about the importance of evidence-based policy making. Let us remind ourselves about what some of these scientific experts have said about culling. Others have already quoted Lord John Krebs, who called the cull policy “mindless”. He was one of the architects of the landmark 10-year culling trials that ended in 2007. He said:

“The scientific case is as clear as it can be: this cull is not the answer to TB in cattle. The government is cherry-picking bits of data to support its case.”

Lord Robert May, a former Government chief scientist and president of the Royal Society, said:

“It is very clear to me that the Government's policy does not make sense.”

He added:

“I have no sympathy with the decision. They are transmuted evidence-based policy into policy-based evidence.”

I want to highlight some of the myths associated with the culling strategy and to suggest some alternatives. Before I do that, let me state again that I absolutely accept that bovine TB is a serious problem that needs to be tackled. However, the evidence shows that badger culling makes the problem even worse for some farmers, and risks making it worse for all of them. Today's debate is not about whether we want to protect cattle or badgers; it is about the most effective way to protect cattle, which, as the evidence shows, is not by killing badgers. That is not because badgers do not necessarily contribute to the cattle TB problem, but because badger culling tends to increase the proportion of badgers

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infected and to spread the disease to new areas. That is because of the perturbation effect, as fleeing badgers spread the disease further afield while the vacuum caused by culling attracts new badgers into newly vacated territory.

Charles Hendry (Wealden) (Con): The hon. Lady will be aware that there is a high-risk area in Sussex, which spreads broadly from her constituency to mine. It is a fairly ring-fenced area. We understand the nature of the problem there, and it is causing real difficulties. Does she recognise that that is an ideal example of where vaccination could be made to work? As the disease is geographically confined, we could see the effects of perturbation and whether, with vaccination, there were different issues that could be managed more effectively.

Caroline Lucas: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention and completely agree. I know that in previous debates, he has raised, as I have, the work of the Sussex badger vaccination project, a volunteer-run service that offers landowners and farmers in east Sussex the chance to have badgers vaccinated at very low cost, thereby providing a humane and less controversial method of tackling the disease. I hope that as many farmers as possible in the area will take up that offer.

I want to talk about some of the myths about culling. One that even DEFRA is promoting—we have heard it several times already today from Government Members—is that results from places such as New Zealand support the strategy of badger culling in the UK. Let us be clear that there are no badgers in New Zealand. The wildlife host there is the brushtail possum, an invasive species introduced from Australia. Possum ecology is completely different from badger ecology. Although culling reduces TB in possums, rather than increasing it, that result cannot simply be transposed to a different species with a different ecology in a different country. Professor Charles Godfray of the Royal Society of Biological Sciences puts it clearly:

“Differences in the regulatory and social structure of farming, the countryside, and the ecology of the different reservoirs all mean that lessons from other countries have to be taken with great caution.”

The bottom line is that bovine TB is too important for us to be cherry-picking the evidence. As we reflect on the pilot culls, it is essential that we put science at the heart of future policy.

Similarly, evidence from the Republic of Ireland has been cited to support claims that culling badgers will help to control TB in England. As with New Zealand, the evidence shows that TB reductions cannot be attributed solely to culling. Crucially, Ireland has much lower badger densities than England, so the badgers respond differently to culling. In England, culling has consistently increased the proportion of badgers with TB. The evidence most applicable to the TB problem in England is information collected in England.

We have heard that during the pilot culls, when the Government's policy on badger control was in

place, the conditions deviated massively from the conditions of the randomised badger culling trial, so any reliance on the results of the RBCT in predicting the likely outcome of culling is completely invalid. Let us not forget that even in the best case scenario the RBCT only reduced the incidence of bovine TB by between

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12% and 16%. In other words, even if we were to take Herculean measures and do absolutely everything in the right amount of time and as cleanly as possible, we would still not be tackling at least 84% of TB in cattle. That is what makes me feel that it is even more important to look at alternative strategies, and chief among them, as many other Members have said, is badger vaccination.

Badger vaccination makes sense for a number of reasons, but I want to mention just two. The first reason is that it works. It reduces the probability of infection by between 70% and 75%. Even allowing for the fact that not all badgers will be reached and vaccination needs to be repeated year on year to include new cubs, it is still more effective and more cost-effective than shooting, not least because vaccination allows the badgers' population structure to remain in place, granting considerable benefits for disease limitation.

Vaccination does not remove infected badgers, but it makes it more difficult for those animals to pass infection to other badgers. Over time, the infected animals die off, and the proportion of infected badgers is expected to decline. That contrasts with culling, which increases the proportion of infected badgers and spreads infection in space.

The second reason is on grounds of cost. Vaccinating badgers is cheaper than culling them, for at least three reasons: First, the poor performance of free shooting suggests that both culling and vaccination would entail cage trapping, with vaccination slightly cheaper because there is no need to dispose of carcasses. Secondly, vaccination is unlikely to require policing. As other members have said, DEFRA estimates the cost of vaccinating badgers to be £2,250 per sq km per year, while policing the first two pilot culls alone cost roughly £4,400 per sq km. Thirdly, as with the example of the Sussex badger vaccination project, many wildlife organisations can draw upon hundreds of volunteers to help with badger vaccination, markedly reducing the costs.

As I have said in all the other parliamentary debates on the subject, we also need to devote more resources and political capital to overcoming the challenges with cattle vaccination, as well as to addressing the role that modern husbandry practices can play in placing chronic stress on intensively farmed animals. Professor John Bourne, chair of the independent scientific group that oversaw the RBCT, stated in his final report that

“implementation of cattle control measures outlined in this report are, in the absence of badger culling, likely to reverse the increasing trend in cattle disease incidence.”

Improving biosecurity must also take priority, as well as stricter testing and movement restrictions. We can see that measures are already playing a part in bringing down the incidence of bovine TB. Others have mentioned the figures recently released by DEFRA showing that during 2013 there was a 14% reduction in the number of cattle slaughtered as TB reactors or direct contacts. We have also seen the evidence from Wales, where a combination of biosecurity, cattle movement restrictions and vaccination is being used to reduce bovine TB, and where the number of cattle herds with the disease fell by 23.6% last year.

This is a complex topic, but my asks of the Minister are simple. First, he should look at the evidence and stop the badger culls for good. He should grant no more licences to shoot badgers, and stop wasting time,

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money and energy on an approach that is making matters worse. As others have said, bovine TB is too important for us to cherry-pick the evidence. As we reflect on the culls, let us make sure that we

put science at the centre of future policy. If the Government were minded to continue with any kind of culling programme, they absolutely must come back to this House first and subject that decision to a vote, because I am convinced that we would win it.

3.55 pm

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Of course, one comes across a lot of emotional issues with constituents, but in the nine years for which I have been the Member of Parliament for Shrewsbury, one of the most emotional experiences I have faced was meeting a dairy farmer in the village of Snailbeach in the southernmost part of my constituency. I went to see him and spent the day on his farm, where I saw at first hand the terrible suffering that he had been through with all his cattle being taken away for slaughter. We sat at his kitchen table afterwards, and over tea he started to cry, and I joined in. It was such an emotional experience seeing a grown man cry and seeing the constant emotional, psychological impact that this was having on him—as on many children. Let us not forget that on many of our Shropshire farms there is not just the farmer but his family, and when the children see these cows being taken away for slaughter, it has a terrible emotional impact on them.

That is why in the previous Parliament I set up the all-party group for dairy farmers. Over 170 Members of Parliament from all political parties joined that campaigning group, and we had an excellent secretariat in the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers. We did not have many resources at our disposal, but we met many organisations from around the country that came to speak to us at the House of Commons—not just from this country but from France and Ireland, as well as other parts of the United Kingdom. After taking evidence for a year, we came to two conclusions: first, that there needed to be a limited cull of badgers; and secondly, that there ought to be a grocery adjudicator to support farmers and deal with some of the more pernicious ways in which the supermarkets were treating them. I am very pleased that there has been movement on those two important suggestions, because when I brought them to the attention of the then Secretary of State for DEFRA, David Miliband, he was completely derisory about both of them.

In Shropshire last year, 2,125 cows were killed as a result of bovine tuberculosis. Although the figures have come down in certain parts of the United Kingdom, as we have heard, that is an increase on the previous year's figure of 1,976. The problem is continuing to increase for all our farmers. At the end of last year, 401 herds in the county were subject to Government movement restrictions. I would like to read to the Minister in the strongest possible way a statement from the vice-chairman of Shropshire NFU, Mr Richard Yates, as reported in today's *Shropshire Star*:

“A vet said to me that there's two types of farmer in Shropshire—those that have TB and those that are going to get it, and that was like a knife in the back to me.”

He went on to say that he goes to market a lot, where he speaks to many Shropshire farmers and is staggered by just how many of them are affected by this terrible

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disease. He has identified correctly that we are spending more than £100 million a year in compensation to farmers. That is a staggering amount of money and I do not think that anybody present would want £100 million to be spent needlessly. Clearly, there are much greater priorities for funding to be spent in the health service, education and all the other things that we want to provide for our constituents.

That is why it is so important that we reach a consensus. Let us try to get it. I am encouraged that there has been talk about some sort of compromise or consensus, because we have been discussing this issue for many years and we do not appear to be any closer today than we have been in years gone by to finally grappling with this terrible disease.

Mr Yates says that he wants the preservation order to be taken off badgers and for farmers and

gamekeepers to be allowed to deal with the problem. He says:

“I have a sett in nearly every field. Badgers are out of control. You never see hedgehogs any more, or ground nesting birds, because the badgers are killing them.”

I have met the Shropshire Wildlife Trust on many occasions. It is the largest organisation in Shropshire, with more than 6,000 members, and, of course, its symbol is a badger. It has taken me on several occasions to see badgers and wildlife and to look at setts. I understand the passion on both sides of the argument, but I say to the Minister that if he and his officials believe that badger culls are necessary in order to grapple with this appalling disease, he must show the courage to continue with that policy. All I care about is stopping this ghastly disease destroying Shropshire’s very important cattle and dairy industries, on which we are so dependent and which I will do everything I can to protect.

4.2 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I agree with the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) that we need to stop this ghastly disease. That is the theme of this debate. One of the benefits of speaking this late in a debate is that everything has already been said. I hope I will not repeat much of it.

As an aside, one thing that has not been mentioned is the number of cows killed as a result of the devastating floods in the west country and whether or not their impact on biodiversity has been beneficial to this problem. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that.

The briefing distributed by the National Farmers Union is very helpful. It reminds us:

“213,799 cattle have been slaughtered due to Bovine Tuberculosis since 2008. The disease imposes a significant burden on taxpayers, with control and testing measures costing the taxpayer around £100m per year, which will rise if TB spread continues unchecked.”

It is a massive problem in every way and it provokes strong emotional responses. The hon. Gentleman described the farmer whose livelihood has been destroyed and with whom one sympathises hugely. I understand why people in the farming industry feel desperate. Likewise, one empathises with those who have been e-mailing us in their hundreds of thousands to voice their concern about the unnecessary, as they see it, destruction of badgers. We as policy makers need to navigate a way through those emotional responses and arrive at the right answer to make things better. If we come up with the wrong answer and make things worse, we will have difficulties.

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There is no doubt whatsoever that TB is a huge problem and we need to tackle it. From listening to this debate and the information provided outside as well as inside this Chamber, the weight of evidence seems to show that badger culling is making things worse rather than better. We would therefore be very unwise to continue an approach that worsens the situation, rather than seeking one that will improve it.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has already covered the fact that it is not terribly helpful to use possums in New Zealand and badgers in Ireland as reference points for dealing with badgers in England. The best evidence for dealing with badgers in England is the huge trial in England over many years—the randomised badger culling trial from 1998 to 2006—which has given us massive evidence about what works and what does not work.

To be fair to the pilot culls, they set out to work to that evidence base in trying to reach the 70% target within six weeks. The shame appears to be that, as the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) clearly pointed out, the pilots failed to meet two out of the three tests that were set. All the evidence is that culling to less than 70% or certainly for more than six weeks causes more problems than it solves. Despite the chorus of voices expressing concern, there is no

doubt that the Government set out with the best of intentions, but with those best of intentions, they have produced the worst of outcomes. We therefore need to think very carefully about what we do now.

Badger vaccination works. The evidence demonstrates that it is an alternative that works: once infected badgers are vaccinated, the hosts are prevented from being transmitted to other badgers and the disease is not passed on. There is an evidence base on the impact of the vaccination of red foxes against rabies, indeed, of human beings against measles. Vaccination works and, on the basis of figures presented to us from the evidence, seems to be more cost-effective and better value for money.

The problem with vaccination is that it takes a bit longer and we have to be a bit more patient. I fully understand the frustration and impatience about the need to do something about this dreadful disease, but if we made matters worse through our impatience, hurry and urgency, that would be the height of foolishness. Sadly, despite everything that has been said, it appears that continuing down this route will create more difficulties not only for badgers, but for cattle and the people whose livelihoods depend on them, as well as for the taxpayer, whose best interests we are all here to represent.

4.8 pm

Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I very much welcome this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) on taking the initiative in calling it, and the Backbench Business Committee on selecting it and providing time for it. Now is the right time for this debate.

The hon. Lady is certainly not responsible for ensuring that we have all the facts from a report at the Government's disposal. By the end of the debate, I hope that it will be clear to the Minister that hon. Members on both sides of the House want to see the report, and that he should at least indicate the timetable for its publication. However, several hon. Members have shared much of the material

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from the leaked report, and we should be cognisant of what it tells us about culling's lack of effectiveness and its inhumane nature, which is why I certainly support the motion.

From listening to this debate, which has been a great education, it is clear that there is no silver bullet—no one single thing that we or the Government can do to bring easily within our grasp our shared goal of eradicating bovine TB. It is a complex, multi-faceted problem and, as such, it requires a comprehensive strategy. I therefore welcome the comments of the former Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath), in which he said that there is a comprehensive strategy. Unfortunately, the strategy is all too often obscured by the need to be concerned about and to debate the inadequate evidence base. Indeed, the evidence demonstrates that culling is not the right strategy. We need to get that debate out of the way so that we can have the necessary focus on delivering all the welcome aspects of the strategy.

The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) made an excellent speech and an excellent demand of the Government. It is great that the Backbench Business Committee has provided us with time to debate this issue. However, given that it does not divide us along party lines, but is of serious concern to Members across the House, I think that the Government should test the opinion of the House on a motion if they are minded to make the case for further culling.

We have heard some compelling evidence in this debate, not least from the leaks of the report. I cannot ignore the evidence that the Government's own test for the humaneness of killing has been breached in so many cases. The guidelines say that it is sufficiently humane if a creature dies within five minutes, but 18% of the badgers did not do so. That raises questions about whether we are travelling in the right direction by maintaining support for the cull. Several colleagues have also mentioned the flight risk that exists with such operations, which can make matters worse, not better.

Several hon. Members have referred to what Wales is doing. If we are to have an informed debate, we need to have all the evidence of the successes and failures in Wales, and to know what lessons can be learned. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders) said, we know that trapping and vaccinating is cheaper than culling, and that it has led to a 33% reduction in the number of cattle that have been slaughtered. He also said that having tighter biosecurity is a way of securing what we all want at a lower cost.

I have a question for the Minister about the vaccination of cattle. Every 10 years, we are told that it will be another 10 years before we get a vaccine. One of the issues is that the tests are not sufficiently refined to distinguish between those that have the infection and those that have had the vaccine. Will the Minister indicate when we might see progress on the testing, so that the vaccine can be used more effectively?

This is a serious matter to which the House keeps returning. I hope that the Government realise that Members across parties and across the House do not believe that the evidence is compelling and clear enough to support the use of culling.

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4.13 pm

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Tuberculosis infection is of major concern to our farming community. The distress that is caused by having to slaughter cattle is immense. Labour Members are fully committed to making progress towards eradicating bovine TB, but we do not believe that culling is the answer.

We know that 94% of TB infection is caused by cattle-to-cattle transmission and only 6% by badger-to-cattle transmission. It therefore makes sense to focus significant efforts on biosecurity, animal husbandry and cattle vaccination. Cattle vaccination puts the farmer firmly in control. I therefore urge the Government, first and foremost, to redouble their efforts to develop an effective vaccine that can be used and tests that can distinguish between vaccinated and sick animals, and to sort out the obstacles to effective trade. In the meantime, as hon. Members have pointed out, a great deal can be done through greater insistence on vigilance, biosecurity and pre-movement testing.

In calling for an end to the Government's costly and cruel culling programme, I will focus on alternative strategies. I will therefore draw hon. Members' attention to the measures that my colleague, Alun Davies AM, who is the Minister for Natural Resources and Food in the Welsh Government, is implementing to tackle TB in cattle.

In Wales, a whole range of measures are being used to strengthen biosecurity. It is early days to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures, but there are some encouraging signs. From December 2012 to November 2013, there was a reduction of 23% in the incidence in new herds and a 33% reduction in the number of animals slaughtered. Since 2010, pre-movement testing has applied to all herds. From 30 September this year, sole occupancy authorities will not automatically be exempted from pre-movement testing. The Welsh Government have also intensified enforcement of cross-compliance penalties for late bovine TB tests. The majority of farmers already comply with the requirements, but this will improve consistency.

In April 2013, the Welsh Government set up a specialist study to look at the regional factors affecting the pattern of disease in Wales to ensure the very best use of resources. Last October, they launched the Cymorth TB programme, or the TB support programme. Its purpose is to give farmers extra help in dealing with a bovine TB breakdown, including help from local vets, and to help farmers to remain TB-free in future.

The Welsh Government have also implemented a badger vaccination programme. In the intensive action area in north Pembrokeshire, 1,400 badgers were vaccinated in 2010, the first year, with

another 1,350 badgers vaccinated in 2013. Participation is voluntary and there has been very good co-operation from landowners. The Welsh Government are also providing a badger vaccination grant, which will meet 50% of the costs of badger vaccination for five years. In June, Wales will host the world mycobacterium bovis conference. This will be an opportunity to share expertise and the experience of implementing measures to eradicate TB.

One of the most depressing truths about the recent cull by this Government is that it was not based on the strongest scientific evidence available in the first place. It need never have taken place. Under the previous

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Labour Government, we commissioned the randomised badger cull trials, the largest scientific project on the effectiveness of culling, which reported in 2007. The report of the independent scientific group on cattle TB stated:

“After careful consideration of all the RBCT and other data presented in this report, including an economic assessment, we conclude that badger culling cannot meaningfully contribute to the future control of cattle TB in Britain.”

As other hon. Members have graphically described, we have witnessed the spectacular failure of the cull. That failure, sadly, was predictable. In conclusion, I call on the Government to work closely with the Welsh Government to look at alternatives to the discredited cull programme for the benefit of farmers across England and Wales.

4.18 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate.

It is far too early to draw conclusions from the report. The House has not yet seen the report properly, and all we are acting on are leaks from it. I have full confidence in the Secretary of State and the other DEFRA Ministers to analyse the report properly and to come to this House with their conclusions. Where we need to cull badgers and it can be done humanely, we must carry on doing so.

Many Members have referred to their own constituencies. It is very likely that vaccinating badgers in a rural constituency with very little TB in cattle, and hardly any TB in the badger population, will be effective—badgers must be vaccinated annually, but that will do a very good job. However, in a constituency such as mine, where some 25% of herds are restricted and are testing positive for TB, and there is a huge amount of TB in the badger population, any amount of vaccination will not cure the infected badger.

The British Veterinary Association has said:

“Scientific evidence proves that badgers and cattle spread bTB to cattle and that the targeted culling of badgers does reduce the levels of infection in cattle herds. Cattle vaccination will be an essential part of the long term strategy to eradicate bTB but will not be available in the UK until at least 2023.”

Will we really be able to wait until 2023, and continue to destroy some 35,000 cattle a year—some 5,600 a year in Devon alone? We cannot go on doing that.

This mythical vaccine was offered to farmers throughout the 13 years of the last Labour Government. Is it any wonder that those poor farmers are pulling their hair out and are almost suicidal because they cannot cure their herds of TB? They are testing their cattle every six weeks. Anyone who tries to organise such tests time and time again, running all those cattle through cattle crushes, will find that it is a huge effort, not just physical but emotional.

When the farmers have tested the cattle and established that they no longer have TB, and when the

reactors have been taken away, what do the farmers do? In the spring and summer they turn their cattle out on to the edges of Exmoor and the Blackdown hills, where there are huge grasslands that are very good for the production of dairy and beef. When the cattle are out in those fields, it is almost impossible to prevent them from mixing with an infected badger population.

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We need cross-party support in this place for action in those areas in particular. It will not be possible to eradicate TB by means of vaccination alone; it will be necessary to remove the infected badgers. The point of carrying out pilots rather than randomised badger culling trials was to establish hard boundaries in order to ensure that there had been no perturbation that would spread the disease to surrounding areas. I hope that the report will provide evidence of that. What the randomised cull did do was reduce the amount of TB in those areas by some 28% or 29%, which shows that the controlling and culling of badgers does work.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) that we need to look at the report. I would be the first to say, as many other Members have, that if we are going to cull, we must be certain that we can cull humanely. If we have to trap more badgers in order to cull them, let us do so.

Caroline Lucas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Neil Parish: I had to wait all afternoon to speak, so I do not think that I will give way.

We have tried for 30 years to control bovine TB in this country, and all that we have seen is increase after increase. We cannot go on doing this for ever, because in the end we will not have a viable cattle herd, and we will not have the food security that we all seek. We must get to grips with this disease.

Finally, let me deal with the myth about what is and is not supposed to be happening in the Republic of Ireland. This is the point on which I really disagree with other Members. It is possible to argue that opossums may be slightly different from badgers in Ireland, but the differences between badgers in Ireland and badgers in Devon are very few. *[Interruption.]* I have listened throughout the afternoon to speeches from the Members who are interrupting, and I have remained very quiet. Perhaps the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) will now listen to what I have to say.

Recent figures from Ireland show that TB infection levels have fallen by more than 45% since 2000. They are now slaughtering fewer than half the cattle they needed to some 10 years ago. This is a substantial reduction that the Irish Government believe their badger culling programme has significantly contributed to. The culling of badgers is the only significant difference between the current approaches taken in England and Ireland; the cattle restrictions and cattle movement orders are virtually the same. Last year 15,612 cattle tested positive in Ireland which represents a 15% reduction on the 2012 levels. The Irish Government have said TB eradication is now a practical proposition in Ireland after the latest figures show a substantial drop in reactor numbers in 2013.

I now quote from the Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine:

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“We believe that, while it is difficult to quantify the precise impact of badger culling on the reduction in the incidence of TB, much of the improvement in the TB situation is due to the badger removal programme.”

Therefore the Irish believe culling badgers has worked to reduce TB in the Republic of Ireland.

In a county such as the one I represent in Devon where over a quarter of the herds are restricted, where we are slaughtering 5,500 cattle a year and where probably

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about 40% of our badger population are infected with bovine TB, we have to take action not only in cleaning the cattle and having stricter cattle movements, but in making sure those badgers are clean so there is no TB in them. If we do that, when we turn our cattle out, it will be safe to do so, and when we drink our milk it will be safe to do so. When our tourists come to Devon and Cornwall and the west country, they will come to see the beautiful herds of beef cattle, such as Devon reds grazing there, that are not infected by TB.

4.27 pm

Sir Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove) (LD): Hazel Grove is in the northern part of Cheshire or the southern part of Greater Manchester, and Cheshire is on the frontier zone of the northern spread of bovine TB. We are officially an edge risk area. In Cheshire there were 143 outbreaks in 2013 and 829 animals were destroyed as a result. Based on DEFRA's figures for the average costs, dealing with bovine TB in Cheshire therefore cost something over £4 million, and more than £1 million—more likely £1.5 million—of that cost fell on farmers. The House will therefore understand that I share a lot of the concerns that have been expressed by those representing agricultural areas, albeit mine is a suburban one, but of course I also get a very large number of e-mails and letters from those who are concerned about the culling of badgers.

I want to focus on the efforts I believe it is right to put into preventing the spread of the disease northwards. I have asked the Minister questions about this and I am working with Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the Cheshire NFU on how we might do that. It is feasible to have a vaccinated zone across Cheshire that acts as a barrier to the spread of infected badgers to the north and hence causes a reduction in the transmission of the disease to cattle.

At the end of last year I visited a badger vaccination project being carried out by Cheshire Wildlife Trust with the full support of the NFU, and with a 50% contribution to the cost by the Department, and I want to thank the Minister for the £250,000 fund that is in place for similar projects around the country. One of my questions to him will be whether he can do more on that front, because having a vaccinated zone in Cheshire is a pretty good guarantee of preventing the spread of the disease further north.

I also want to thank the Minister for the support that the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency, which is funded by the Department, is giving to the road-kill testing of badgers in Cheshire. That project is being run by the university of Liverpool, and I hope that it will provide us with more evidence on the prevalence of the disease among badgers, as well as assisting us in reducing that prevalence.

I thank the Minister and his predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath), for the steps that they have taken to improve data sharing. One of the absurdities of the situation up to about 18 months ago was that data protection legislation was being used to prevent adjacent farmers from finding out about outbreaks. In Cheshire, where herds are frequently moved from one farm to another to exploit grazing opportunities, farmers were at risk of moving animals

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into an area adjacent to one in which infection had been detected. I am pleased to say that a little more data sharing is now in place, but I ask the Minister whether he is satisfied that data transmission is now at an appropriate level. I am meeting representatives of Cheshire NFU tomorrow morning, and I expect them to tell me how it is on the ground, so he might want to make sure that he has got his story straight.

I am very keen to ensure that we succeed in stopping the spread of bovine TB further north into Cheshire and beyond. That is why I very much encouraged the Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the NFU to work together on vaccination. I want to point out that vaccination is not quite as simple as we in the House sometimes make it sound. There is a narrow calendar window during which the badgers can be vaccinated. They spend the winter months in their setts and are inaccessible. There is a narrow period of time during the day, too, when vaccination can take place. It has to be early in the day and they have to be trapped as they come out overnight.

The trapping is not simple: we do not want to catch rabbits or foxes; we want to catch badgers. The trap has to be laid in a particular way, and the bait has to be under a suitably heavy stone that neither rabbits nor foxes can move, but that badgers can, in order to shut the trap. I am impressed by the care and thought that goes into the capture of the animals, and by the professionalism that is needed to do it.

The day I visited a farm in the south of Cheshire, eight or nine traps had been laid, and they yielded four badgers. One professional gentleman had spent a whole day setting the traps, vaccinating the animals, releasing them and clearing the traps, and he got just four badgers. It is slow, complicated work, and of course that process has to be repeated each year. I am not decrying the process; I am simply saying that there is not a solution to this problem that can be achieved by waving a magic wand.

Will the Minister give the House an undertaking that those of us who live in edge risk areas—the frontier zones, as I call them—will have all the support that is needed for an intensive vaccination programme to prevent the spread of the disease northwards? Will he ensure that the data sharing relating to outbreaks is at a level that will really prevent the possibility of herds being unwittingly moved back into infected areas?

I also want to raise a point that was put to me by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust. In carrying out the vaccination programme in south Cheshire, the trust discovered more or less the same thing that had been discovered in the culling areas—namely, that there did not seem to be as many badgers as people were expecting. Does the Minister think that the assessment of the density of the badger population, on which the whole culling exercise seems to have been based, is a realistic one? Is he satisfied that the calculations that spring from that assessment have been made on a sound basis? If, when we get to the capture of animals—or in the case of culling, the destruction of animals—the animals simply are not there, the whole calculation becomes different. For those of us in the edge zone—the high risk zone—the solution on offer is not culling but the creation of a cordon sanitaire. The problem is not easy to resolve anywhere, but we believe that there is a specific solution that will do exactly that, at least in our area, and I would like the support of the Minister in achieving it.

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4.35 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for choosing the debate and the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) for introducing it—with great fortitude, I might add, and I commend her for that. I also thank the cross-party group of MPs who secured the debate, which is hugely significant and timely, because the Minister is considering wider roll-outs. We have seen cross-party support for a new way forward and a new consensus based on vaccination and cattle measures.

I thank all Members who have spoken, even those whose opinions I respect but disagree with. There were many good contributions, including by the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh), who has great experience, and the hon. Members for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), for Brecon and Radnorshire (Roger Williams)—we go back a long way—for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish). I may

not agree with many of the points that they made, but they spoke with passion for their constituents.

Those who have spoken for the motion today and for a considered, cross-party and scientific consensus on the way forward include the hon. Member for St Albans, who made the point that this is not a case of one side against another; my hon. Friends the Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), for Dumfries and Galloway (Mr Brown), for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson), for Copeland (Mr Reed), for Newport West (Paul Flynn), for Derby North (Chris Williamson), for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), for Inverclyde (Mr McKenzie), for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and for Llanelli (Nia Griffith); the hon. Members for St Ives (Andrew George), for Southend West (Mr Amess), for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), for Torbay (Mr Sanders) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas); and the right hon. Members for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Burstow) and, lately, for Hazel Grove (Sir Andrew Stunell). In every part of the Chamber, on every Bench, there have been calm, rational and methodical arguments on why we should have a different way forward.

A number of questions face Ministers today. Why continue to pursue a policy of eradicating bovine TB in cattle involving mass culling of badgers? It proved hugely costly to taxpayers and farmers and was critically flawed, from the first principles, through the methodology to the application in the field. It failed to meet the Government's own limited tests of effectiveness and humaneness. In short, not enough badgers were culled, and too many were not killed cleanly, but suffered before dying. Culls have diverted stretched police resources from front-line duties to deal with protesters and to ensure public safety, prompting police and crime commissioners to speak out in opposition. Culls are deeply unpopular with the public throughout the country, in town and country alike. Culls are scientifically controversial to the point of flying in the face of mainstream, expert advice, from which, as we have seen today, increasing numbers of Government MPs are making the right and intelligent choice to seek alternative, workable strategies for TB eradication.

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Why pursue such a policy when it is so clearly contested scientifically, so deeply flawed methodologically and so evidently failing, and when there are proven alternatives, which are more humane, more effective, cheaper and more publicly acceptable? Why do that when scientists, many farmers, MPs from all parties and Her Majesty's loyal Opposition are willing to work with the Government on an alternative strategy that will be enduring and effective and garner widespread stakeholder and public support? In all sincerity, despite—in fact because of—those flawed and failed culls in Gloucester and Somerset, it is not too late for Ministers to think again and for us to work together on a better way forward.

Before addressing what has gone wrong with the culls and what can now be done, let me make it clear that Labour agrees entirely and unequivocally that the scourge of bovine TB must be eradicated. It must be eradicated because of the terrible waste of productive cattle, the destruction of pedigree herds, the cash-flow and wider economic impacts on family farms, the psychological trauma for farmers and their families, and the unsustainable cost of compensation payments. Some have pointed out that many more tens of thousands of cattle are slaughtered each year for many other reasons—mastitis, lameness, old age, inability to calve and so on. That is true, but 1% of the total cattle herd, dairy and non-dairy, in the UK is slaughtered because of bovine TB, and that is unacceptable. What also distinguishes that from other reasons for slaughter is that it is a notifiable disease. We have a public and legal duty to bear down on it, and pressing trade reasons to do so, too. On that, we are at one with the Government.

We support the UK and the Welsh Governments for their increasingly stringent efforts, working with farmers, to clamp down on the disease by use of cattle measures. As this is a disease in cattle, the primary resolution will be in cattle measures. Some Ministers give the impression that badgers are the main culprits, yet we know from exhaustive in-field studies that although there is some direct transmission of TB from infected badgers to cattle—it is about 6% of the total—and that that may indeed play a role in subsequent onward transmission, cattle-to-cattle transmission is the major

element.

We know also that the most significant spike in TB was linked to the rapid spread of the disease in the immediate aftermath of foot and mouth disease, when the restocking of cattle took place northwards and westwards, often from areas further south where TB was present. In addition, there have been sporadic occurrences in parts of the country and farms where there has been no history of TB, and we must note the presence of TB-free farms in the midst of hotspot areas. All that reinforces the scientific conclusion that stringent cattle measures are key to a successful strategy of eradication. Movement restrictions, risk-based trading, rigorous biosecurity and other measures will play the most substantial part in eradicating the disease.

However, we also need fully to recognise the need to tackle reservoirs of the disease in wildlife, where appropriate. Our disagreement with the Government—it is a profound disagreement—is over the best means of addressing the wildlife reservoir. We believe, as do many farmers and leading scientific opinion, backed by mounting evidence of success, which has been set out before the Minister today, that there is another way to tackle badger TB which has greater certainty of success and avoids the significant risks of a mass-culling programme.

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Before I expand on an alternative approach, we have to examine what went wrong with the Government's culls last year. There was a sequence of dire policy miscalculations, each of which compounded the other and led to wholesale failure. The crucial baseline population of badgers was first overestimated, then underestimated; a risky and wholly untested "free-shoot" approach was adopted, which promptly but predictably failed; more costly cage-trap-shoot methods were rapidly then introduced, yet still too few badgers were culled in the time frame allowed, posing an increased risk of spreading TB; the six-week time-frame was then controversially extended and, again, still too few badgers were killed; and, meanwhile, police patrolled the country trying to maintain order for deeply unpopular culls, and running up bills for the taxpayer.

We now understand from a delayed but leaked Government report that too many badgers died inhumanely, enduring suffering before death. As an aside, I note that the British Veterinary Association, of which I am proud to be an honorary member, predicated its support on these culls being humane—watch this space.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Between 1998 and 2010, the number of herd breakdowns tripled from 1,226 to 3,334, and the number of cattle slaughtered rose sixfold, from 4,102 to 24,000. Given what I am hearing from the Labour Front-Bench team today, can our farmers, who are suffering so terribly from this disease, expect more of the same?

Huw Irranca-Davies: No, and I refer the hon. Gentleman, who makes a valid point, to the figures for the past three years, which have shown a downward trend.

I say to the Minister that the two key tests for the Government of effectiveness and humaneness have been failed. So let us not keep inflicting this costly policy failure and public relations disaster on farmers, taxpayers and wildlife. Let us learn the lessons from these two failed and costly culls, stop them now and look at the alternative way forward, which can be cheaper, more humane and more effective.

Look instead to Wales, where there has been a significant and substantial reduction in TB, at twice the rate of the decline in England. That happened without culling, but with vaccination and stringent cattle measures. Look to Northern Ireland, where BTB is declining faster, without culling, than in the Republic, where culling is taking place. Look closer to home, in England, where the incidence of BTB began to decline even before the culls started. We repeatedly pointed out that trend to Ministers, who either ignored or denied it. The trend is even more apparent now that Ministers have admitted that the figures incorrectly overstated BTB.

More and more MPs from across the parties, including independent-minded Government MPs, are

calling on Ministers to pause and think again. There is a different approach to tackling TB in cattle and wildlife, if only Ministers would listen to the evidence, and to the increasing numbers of MPs of their own party who have lost faith in these deeply flawed culls. We want the Government to work with the science and across political parties to seek a new, lasting consensus on the way forward. Labour, scientists, and many farmers want to do that,

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so I repeat the offer that I made to the Secretary of State in writing in December: work with us, with farmers, and with the evidence to agree a new, better way forward.

4.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

(George Eustice): I begin by picking up on a point made by the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick): this is an incredibly difficult disease to fight, and there are no easy answers in the war against TB. There are several reasons for that. First, it is a very slow-growing, insidious disease, which makes it incredibly difficult to detect. It has been hard to get a reliable means of diagnosis. Secondly, the disease lives within the cell wall of blood cells, and that makes it very difficult to get a vaccine to work. That is why the BCG vaccine, which is the only thing that we have, is only partially effective and provides no cure. That is why the Government have been very clear that we need to pursue a range of options to roll back the disease. We are clear that no one measure on its own will work; instead, we need to pursue a range of strategies to bear down on the disease. We set those out clearly in our draft TB eradication strategy, the final version of which will be published shortly. It sets out a range of options; I want to come back to that, because this is an area in which I think there will be consensus across the House.

There is one area where, clearly, we take a different view from the Opposition. Our view is that nowhere in the world has managed successfully to tackle TB without also dealing with the reservoir of the disease in the wildlife population. A couple of hon. Members have attempted to cast doubt on that—they have mentioned possums in New Zealand and asked whether the case is the same—but in Ireland and France, cull strategies have been successfully pursued.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

George Eustice: I will not give way. I want to carry on and make this point, because there were lots of issues raised. If Members do not accept that international comparisons are relevant, I say: look at the historical comparisons. We got on top of TB in the 1960s and '70s by pursuing a badger cull strategy. Early attempts through measures such as the clean ring strategy pursued by Dunnet in the late '80s had some success. The RBCTs that the previous Government ran also showed a 16% reduction in the disease.

I want to say a little about vaccination, because we recognise that it can provide some benefits. It can pass on some immunity to cubs, and can cause less disturbance to the badger population, but there are difficulties with it. The badgers have to be successfully trapped and vaccinated; St Ives—the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) has talked to me about this—has managed to catch only seven in the past year. We should recognise that no vaccine is 100% effective; the evidence is that it is roughly 60% effective.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

George Eustice: No, I will not; I will keep going.

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Bill Wigg: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As DEFRA has not released its report, it would be demeaning to the House to have a Division on this issue. Is it your view that Mr Speaker's ruling should be maintained—that is, that if a Member shouts, he should vote in the way that he

shouts?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): You know very well, as I do, that if a Member shouts one way, they should not vote the other way, but they could abstain.

George Eustice: I want to say a little about what we have done to progress an oral vaccine. We are spending £1.6 million a year—

Andrew George: The Minister referred to the trials that were about to commence in the Penwith area with the support of DEFRA, which is providing the vaccine ampoules, which is much appreciated. He said it was only seven. It was only a small trial of the methodology, not of the numbers.

George Eustice: I expect my hon. Friend will do better next year.

As I said, we are spending £1.6 million a year developing an oral vaccine. We have made some progress on the dose required for that vaccine, and it is around 10 times more than would be needed for an injectable vaccine. We have also made some progress towards identifying a bait that would be successful, and we have made some progress towards linking the vaccine to fats that can help get it through the digestive system. But there are drawbacks even to an oral vaccine. Not all badgers will take it, and some badgers may eat more of it than others, so it will never be 100%. But we accept that nothing in this challenge is 100% and that is why we are pursuing it.

On injectable vaccines, I have had representations from my hon. Friends the Members for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) and for Brighton, Kemptown (Simon Kirby) to look again at whether we could refocus some of our vaccination efforts, either in the edge area, as the right hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Sir Andrew Stunell) suggested, or around the east Sussex area. I have said that we will look closely at that. As several hon. Members have pointed out, we are doing some work in that area now, and we would be willing to develop that further.

On cattle vaccines, the Secretary of State met the commissioner on this just last week. We are continuing to do some work to develop a DIVA test. Field trials will take three to five years, so as a number of hon. Members have pointed out, it will be eight or nine years before we can get export clearance for the use of such a cattle vaccine. However, we are committed to taking this forward.

I agree with hon. Members that improving the control of cattle movements is an important tool in the fight against TB, but I simply point out that we have done a lot already. We now have annual testing in the high-risk area, and four-yearly testing across the whole country. We have banned practices such as approved quarantine units. We now have radial testing in the low-risk areas where we get an outbreak. We have stopped cattle going to major shows since July 2012. We have introduced risk-based trading to help farmers manage the risks. We have an ongoing consultation about restricting movements

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and introducing pre-movement and post-movement tests to common land. We are introducing deductions for farmers who are late in having their TB test, and we have reduced the pre-movement testing window from 60 to 30 days. So we are doing a huge amount, but I accept that we should be constantly looking to improve and do more, and we are looking, as the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders) suggested, at whether more could be done, for instance, on biosecurity measures.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

George Eustice: I am going to run out of time and I want to leave time for the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main).

On effectiveness, we have already published the numbers of badgers that were culled in both Somerset, where it was 940, and Gloucester, where it was 921. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) invited me to speculate on what the effect on the population might have been from the recent flooding. One lesson that we have learnt is that it is difficult precisely to estimate badger

populations. The RBCT did not use head trapping of the sophistication that we did, rather it used things like sett surveys, and there is a huge amount of doubt about whether it had a clear understanding of the badger population.

A number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) have highlighted that the RBCT concluded that the aim should be to remove 70% of the badger population. We accept that and that is why we had that as a target. However, it is wrong to say that if that target is not hit in the first year, the disease will be made worse. The RBCT clearly showed that three of the 10 test areas where there was a proactive cull got between 30% and 40% in year one, but provided that was sustained in subsequent years, it went on to have a significant impact in reducing the disease.

Finally, on the humaneness issue, I know that this is a sentimental matter for many people. In fact, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) highlighted the poem “The Badger”. All I will say is that I hope that hon. Members can develop some perspective, because shooting is used as a means of controlling foxes and all sorts of other wildlife. If hon. Members were to go to Bushy park or Richmond park in September and October, they would find signs up saying that a cull of deer was going on and so the park was closed. No one would bat an eyelid. I hope that we can develop some perspective—

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

George Eustice: I am not going to give way, but I know what the hon. Lady is going to say.

We recognise that there are challenges with shooting badgers. That is why we issued best practice guidance that specified a range of less than 70 metres using a rifle, that they should target the chest, the type of rifle that could be used and that the animal must be stationary and over a bait point. It might be that lessons can be learnt from that to improve the proficiency of marksmen and we can obviously consider that.

I want to pick up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Mr Amess) about monitoring. He said that it was insufficient and we do not accept that. We were required to monitor 60 of the culls but

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monitored 88 and we were required to carry out 120 post-mortems but carried out 150. We did more monitoring than was required.

As the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Roger Williams) and my hon. Friends the Members for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) said, this is a devastating disease having a devastating impact on cattle farmers. When I visited one of the Gloucester culls I met a Gloucestershire farmer who had been under restriction for 12 years. He was not moving cattle on or off; it was being caused not by cattle but by a large badger sett on his farm that was infected by TB. I saw another farmer who had lost an entire pedigree herd as a result of the disease. We know that if we do nothing it will cost us £1 billion over the next 10 years and, as I said at the start, although we are pursuing a range of options, no single measure on its own is the solution to the problem. There is no example anywhere in the world of a country that has successfully tackled TB without also tackling the reservoir of disease in the wildlife population.

4.56 pm

Mrs Main: I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for their compassionate remarks in this important debate. Although I have not been in the Chamber for all of it, I have watched it all and I recognise the passion on both sides.

I stress again that the debate is not about one side against another. It is about whether we are pursuing the right strategy. I would like the House to express its wish today, but I recognise that the

motion does not bind the Minister. Whatever the result of the vote today, if there is a vote, I hope that the Minister will take the issue away and reflect on it, read the report and come back before the House with a statement and a votable motion of his own. I recognise that, without that, we will get no further on this difficult subject, which gives rise to a lot of passion but on which we should not just be being seen to be doing something. I thank all hon. Members for taking the time to come here on a Thursday for this important debate.

Question put.

The House divided:

Ayes 219, Noes 1.

Division No. 232]

[

4.58 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Amess, Mr David
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Dame Anne
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blears, rh Hazel
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben

Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burstow, rh Paul
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Caton, Martin
Champion, Sarah
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crausby, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Crouch, Tracey
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Sir Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, Philip
De Piero, Gloria
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobson, rh Frank

Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Fuller, Richard
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hanson, rh Mr David

Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hemming, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huppert, Dr Julian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jamieson, Cathy
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Jowell, rh Dame Tessa
Kane, Mike
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
Mactaggart, Fiona

Mahmood, Shabana
Main, Mrs Anne
Malhotra, Seema
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKenzie, Mr Iain
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Meale, Sir Alan
Miliband, rh Edward
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme
(Livingston)
Morris, Grahame M.
(Easington)
Munn, Meg
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Percy, Andrew
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen

Randall, rh Sir John
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reckless, Mark
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, Mr Steve
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Robertson, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sarwar, Anas
Sawford, Andy
Seabeck, Alison
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Henry
Smith, Nick
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, rh Sir Andrew
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Mr Andrew
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen

Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Vickers, Martin
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mr Tom
Watts, Mr Dave
Weatherley, Mike
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Woodcock, John
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:

Graham Jones
and
Tom Blenkinsop

NOES

Hollobone, Mr Philip

Tellers for the Noes:

Mr Alan Campbell
and
Mr David Hamilton

Question accordingly agreed to.

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Resolved,

That this House believes that the pilot badger culls in Gloucestershire and Somerset have decisively failed against the criteria set out by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in guidance to Natural England for licensing of the culls, which stipulated that 70 per cent of the

badger population should be culled within a six-week period; notes that the costs of policing, additional implementation and monitoring, and the resort to more expensive cage-and-trap methods over an extended period have substantially increased the cost of the culls, and strengthened the financial case for vaccination; regrets that the decision to extend the original culls has not been subject to any debate or vote in Parliament; further regrets that the Independent Expert Panel will only assess the humaneness, safety and effectiveness of the original six-week period and not the extended cull period; and urges the Government to halt the existing culls and granting of any further licences, pending development of alternative strategies to eradicate bovine TB and promote a healthy badger population.

Huw Irranca-Davies: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Parliament has today expressed a very clear view that the mass culling of badgers is not appropriate as part of a bovine TB eradication strategy. I also learnt today, from a response to my named day question, that the Secretary of State has now received, and is now considering, the delayed independent expert report, which will likely condemn the culls as ineffective and inhumane. May I therefore ask the Minister, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to confirm that a full debate and vote in Government time will now take place before any decision to proceed with an existing or new cull takes place?

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Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): That is not a matter for me, as the hon. Gentleman is well aware, but I am sure that his point will have been heard. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister wishes to respond, I am happy for him to do so.

George Eustice: I will respond, Mr Deputy Speaker, because obviously the shadow Minister has an issue with the fact that we have received the report. We have indeed received it, and we are considering it. It was not our decision when the report was delivered to us; an independent expert panel decided that. It was not our decision to have this debate, nor did we get involved in the decision of the Backbench Business Committee to have the debate today, and nor is it the role of Labour Members to dictate when the Government should publish the report. Let me be very clear: we have always been clear that we will publish the report and then, when we have made a decision—we have not made any decisions yet—*[Interruption.]* No, I am not going to confirm that there will be a vote. I have discussed and debated this many times, and I am sure we will have many opportunities to do so again in the future.

Miss McIntosh: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. We have had a very well-mannered, even-handed and good-tempered debate, and I regret that we have had what the record may prove to be a vote on very erroneous grounds indeed. I would like to refer to this point of order when we have the record of the vote.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will be quite honest: I do not treat what you have said as a point of order. There is no record of the vote as yet, and we will have to wait and see.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is now the second time the House has debated this issue on a Back-Bench motion, with overwhelming votes to stop the cull. What good is it having debates in Parliament if the Government are wilfully staying out of the Lobby, not involving themselves in voting for the policy that they are pursuing in the country, and taking no notice whatsoever of votes of this House. Is not this making this House an irrelevance?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I can understand that frustration is being shown at this time, but I am not in a position to offer any more advice.

Paul Flynn: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that this debate was followed by many thousands of people throughout the country who have shown great interest in it through their tweets and responses. Will they not regard it as an outrage when there is a vote of 219 to one and the Government decide to ignore it? Are they out to prove themselves to be the

really nasty party?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is also not a point of order. It is a matter for the Government when and if they wish to have a vote.