

8 May 2009

Thank you for your letter of 10 March to my Conservative South West colleague, Neil Parish MEP, with regards to Bovine Tuberculosis.

I can assure you that we Conservatives in Europe have urged the European Commission to put pressure on Hillary Benn to adopt an eradication plan for Bovine TB in ALL animals and wildlife, not just cattle.

The Commission confirmed that they would be sending a taskforce of experts to the UK in May 2009 to review the situation, and in the meantime the UK Government were to prepare an eradication plan. The taskforce are expected to begin work in the UK once this plan has been presented, but it is now overdue.

Consequently, it is inevitable that the Commission will have to intervene, forcing action, as their powers leave them with options ranging from enforcing trade bans, to taking legal action against the Government for failure to implement EU law.

The UK Government have been slow in dealing with this problem. They have been culling cattle but failing to deal with other wildlife that can transmit the disease. As you suggest, the disease didn't prove an issue for you until after badgers became a protected species and their population escalated, the problem needs to be dealt with strongly from the initial cause, not just in the aftermath of an outbreak.

DEFRA recently announced the introduction of a vaccine for badgers, but this would be conducted within a cost sharing exercise between the Government and the farming industry, which we do not believe to be acceptable. Burdening the farming community with these "animal health issue and disease control" costs will seriously affect an industry already struggling, for example in the aftermath of the last foot and mouth outbreak which DEFRA itself is held responsible for.

I have been assured by Conservative colleagues on the Agriculture committee that pressure will be put on the Commission to deal with the UK Government's lack of action, and I hope following this, the Government will respond to the issue of the total eradication of Bovine TB with the urgency it deserves.

Giles Chichester MEP