A group of high-profile vets have written to the prime minister urging him to halt the expansion of the Government’s controversial badger cull.

Culling of badgers across south-west England has been a central part of the Government’s strategy to eradicate BTB by 2028, but the policy has always had fierce critics within the veterinary profession, with more than 100,000 badgers killed since the programme began in 2013.

In 2018, Charles Godfrey led an internal review into the eradication strategy, in response to which it was announced earlier this year that a cattle vaccination trial would be rolled out while the intensive culling of badgers would be scaled back.

However, the culled is set to resume this autumn with several new sites added, prompting a pressure group led by several high-profile vets – including former deputy UK CVQO Nick Simmons – to write to Boris Johnson urging him to halt the plan.

In their letter they claim badgers are not heavily infected with BTB, that culling is ineffective and that current BTB testing protocols for cattle are creating a “hidden reservoir of infection” that will mean eradication of the infection will be “entirely unachievable”.

Writing to Mr Johnson, lead author Iain McGill said: “We note your Government’s intention to initiate a huge expansion of killing by issuing as many as one licence in two years, in areas that were only marginally infected with BTV in 2019. We note that the original licences were issued for a year, while the current licences this autumn will be all but impossible to eradicate using the current testing protocols.”

“Smokescreen”

The letter continued: “Unless the hidden reservoir of infection is brought under control, the eradication of BTV in cattle is entirely unachievable by 2038 and badger culling a mere smokescreen for policy failure.”

“If a testing system with a sensitivity of only 59% per cent was to be used to diagnose COVID-19, the disease would be impossible to control and there would be public outrage.”

“We applaud your Government’s stated aim of phasing out badger culling, but this appears to be in stark contrast to your apparent intention.”

“If you instruct your secretary of state to revoke licences and explore in short order the alternative methods for disease control that we describe, public opinion and sentiment will be with you.”

“If, however, your Government chooses to continue the discredited and ineffective badger culling policy, you will be remembered as the prime minister who presided over the greatest slaughter of a protected animal in living memory.”

Responding to the letter, BVA junior vice-president James Russell said: “BTB is a devastating chronic disease of cattle and a major challenge facing large parts of the UK cattle farming industry today.”

“Our recent position paper considered a broad range of control measures – including cattle testing, and the culling and vaccination of badgers – to set out a road map that we hope will guide vets, farmers and the Government in ongoing efforts to tackle this disease.”

Among some of its key recommendations are the prioritisation of research to evaluate the impact of badger vaccination on disease incidence in cattle, an earned recognition framework for issuing cull licences, and providing farmers and their vets with the autonomy to consider the most appropriate control measures in their farm environment.

“We continue to support a holistic approach to tackling BTB that utilises all the available tools in the toolbox.”

Fleet-footed Faulkner raises £10k for StreetVet

VET Brian Faulkner has completed an epic fund-raising challenge after running the full length of the UK in exactly one month.

Mr Faulkner, well known in the sector for his charity efforts – he ran the equivalent of one marathon a day for 31 straight days during an epic marathon, which took him from John O’Groats in Scotland to Land’s End in Cornwall.

The total distance covered by Mr Faulkner was 846 miles – a mammoth figure, but one that is dwarfed by the £10,000 his mammoth figure, but one that is dwarfed by the £10,000 his running efforts have been able to do his bit to help the cause by completing his marathon on 31 August – the day of his 50th birthday.

He said: “I am delighted to have completed this journey. The weather didn’t make it easy all the time, but at least it was a beautiful day in Land’s End. I am grateful to all the media outlets that have helped promote StreetVet’s cause, as well as all the donations.

“I would like to thank all my supporters along the way. I couldn’t have done it without you. Now it’s time to get back to normal with my family.”

‘Sad day’ for RCVS after council leak investigation

The RCVS has completed an investigation into leaks of confidential information from council that were then published in Veterinary Record.

It is understood the documents related to various matters, including discussions around the potential sale of the college’s central London headquaters, Belgravia House.

The results of the investigation were presented at the last meeting of RCVS council (13 September), which concluded that several deliberate leaks of information had occurred and came from a member of council.

However, the investigation was unable to find who was responsible – and because no member of council came forward to admit responsibility, the college has been forced to halt the inquiry.

RCVS president Mandisa Greene said: “There is no denying this is a sad day for the college.”

VETs urge Boris to end ‘slaughter’ of badgers

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