

Legal challenge against badger cull becomes more costly

NATURAL England has reportedly sought to increase the financial costs for two animal welfare campaign groups in relation to their ongoing legal challenge around supplementary badger culling licences.

The government body is thought to have petitioned for an increase in the adverse cost cap (payable if the legal challenge fails) from £10,000 to £20,000 for Wild Justice, and £10,000 to £30,000 for the Badger Trust, a move that the trust has deemed as ‘intimidation’.

This year, Natural England issued nine new supplementary badger control (SBC) licences and maintained 17 existing SBCs. The Badger Trust and Wild Justice claim that these licences were issued unlawfully for the purpose of maintaining the confidence of farmers rather than preventing disease spread.

The Badger Trust has previously launched legal challenges opposing the badger cull but is yet to be successful. These challenges, among others, are thought to have incurred significant costs for Natural England.

Peter Hambly, CEO of the Badger Trust, claimed that the move went against the Aarhus Convention – an



international agreement that sets the standard adverse cost cap at £10,000 to allow for public participation in environmental decision-making – and stated: ‘We are shocked that Natural England – a body supposed to conserve nature – is trying to intimidate us from taking legal action to protect nature.’

‘This is against the purpose of the Aarhus Convention and the way they are disregarding international agreements to continue with the ineffective slaughter of badgers shows how desperate they are to back a failed policy.’

A Natural England spokesperson said they could not comment on ongoing legal issues but that the body fully supported the Aarhus Convention and carefully considered all relevant factors when making decisions about issuing badger culling licences.



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Discussing hot topics in Northern Ireland

BOVINE TB (bTB) and access to veterinary medicines were high on the agenda at the BVA’s 2024 Northern Ireland dinner in Stormont earlier this month.

BVA president Elizabeth Mullineaux highlighted that the grace period for supplying veterinary medicines into Northern Ireland was coming to an end next year, but the new UK government’s willingness to reach a veterinary agreement with the EU provided a ‘new opportunity to secure access to veterinary medicines’. She said the BVA would be ‘increasing our lobbying, to ensure ministers and officials not only understand the scale of the issue, but prioritise it so supply of Northern Ireland veterinary medicines is at the forefront of any agreement’.

Access to veterinary medicines was also a priority for the Northern Ireland minister of agriculture, environment and rural affairs, Andrew Muir, who also spoke at the dinner. But another area where action was required was bTB. He said it was an aim to tackle the ‘unacceptable levels of TB’ in the Northern Irish herd. He reported that a review of the bTB situation and ways to reduce and, eventually,

FINDING AN ALTERNATIVE TO FIREWORKS

Over 90 per cent of Brits would be open, to some degree, to alternatives to fireworks, a cross party think tank has found. Partial replacements for traditional fireworks could include lasers, drones or silent/quiet fireworks, and would make firework displays more animal friendly.

Earlier this month, the Social Market Foundation (SMF) published a report – ‘Out with the bang’ – sponsored by the RSPCA, which included polling of 1000 British adults.

Nearly one-quarter of those polled were found to be open to complete replacement of traditional fireworks, while 91 per cent were open to some degree of alternatives being used alongside traditional fireworks.

The report contains recommendations for changes to British firework displays, including reducing maximum decibel levels; limiting the sale of consumer fireworks; allowing local councils to designate ‘firework-free zones’ in areas where fireworks are likely to have a greater impact on animals, the environment and vulnerable persons; and encouraging local councils to incorporate alternatives such as drone displays and light shows into their traditional displays.

Carrie Stones, campaigns manager at the RSPCA, said: ‘A review of fireworks regulations – including limiting the sale and usage of fireworks to certain times of year, implementing firework control zones and reducing maximum noise levels – will protect animals from harm. The SMF’s findings show that the majority of people support this as well.’

The full report can be found at www.smf.co.uk/publications/alternatives-to-trad-fireworks



eradicate the disease in Northern Ireland had been carried out and would be released in a few weeks.

Bovine TB was also mentioned by Declan McAleer, a member of the legislative assembly, who hosted the event, and by BVA Northern Ireland Branch president Sharon Verner who highlighted that visits and data collected by private vets was 'key in keeping infection out'.

Man sentenced for sheep cloning charges

A MAN from Montana, USA, has been sentenced to six months in prison for using tissue to create giant hybrid sheep for captive trophy hunting.

Arthur 'Jack' Schubarth, 81, illegally imported tissue belonging to a Marco Polo Argali sheep hunted in Kyrgyzstan in 2013. Schubarth was also found guilty of illegally obtaining genetic material from wild hunted native Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.

Argali sheep are protected under CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), an international agreement aiming to protect endangered species and control any trade in both live specimens and body parts.

According to court documents, genetic material from the Argali sheep was sent to a laboratory in order to create cloned embryos. This process resulted in a single male Marco Polo Argali ram named Montana Mountain King (MMK).

Semen was collected from this ram for sale across the USA alongside its hybrid offspring, with one apparently fetching \$10,000. Schubarth, who owns Sun River Enterprises LLC, sells 'alternative livestock' to private hunting preserves, where hunters can shoot the animals for a fee.

In addition to the jail sentence, Schubarth was fined \$20,000 and ordered to pay \$4000 to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Following sentencing Schubarth

said he was ashamed of his actions, adding: 'I got my normal mindset clouded by my enthusiasm and looked for any grey area in the law to make the best sheep I could for this sheep industry.'

MMK, the cloned sheep, will be sent to a zoo.

Protecting the welfare of Egyptian tilapia

AN assurance scheme to improve the welfare of farmed tilapia has reached approximately 15 per cent of the sector in Egypt, meaning it covers around 260 million fish.

The Tilapia Welfare Egypt project is an initiative run by Ethical Seafood Research, a Scotland-based organisation, in cooperation with the Food Animal Initiative consultancy. It is designed to raise welfare standards for farmed Nile tilapia and uses measurable on-site parameters to assess the welfare status of fish on farms in the Egyptian Nile.

Tilapiine fish are the second-most farmed group of fish globally (after carp), with the most common tilapia species being the Nile tilapia.

In 2019 Egypt alone produced over one million metric tonnes of tilapia, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. Although tilapia production is projected to increase, there are minimal data on optimum conditions for these animals, meaning their welfare may be suboptimal on many farms.

The welfare project has targets regarding environment, health, nutrition and behaviour. While



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indicators of welfare such as signs of aggression can be directly linked to management approaches, such as stocking fish in variably sized groups, work is still required to produce more species-specific data to validate other indicators.

Ethical Seafood Research has said it hopes its project will 'mark a historic step for animal welfare in Egypt' when implemented alongside an ongoing project on introducing humane slaughter methods.