



Badger cull study 'was watered down' over issue of whether it stopped cattle catching TB

A senior civil servant forced a journal to make changes to scientific research which revealed there was no evidence the badger cull stopped cattle catching tuberculosis.

Experts who analysed statistics on the disease from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) found no link between culling and any decline in bovine TB between 2013 and 2019.

Their research was published in leading independent journal the Vet Record in March – but only after Eleanor Brown, a senior Defra civil servant and deputy director of the bovine TB programme, pressured the editor into forcing the authors to ‘water down’ their findings.

Vets Iain McGill and Mark Jones – head of policy for charity Born Free, which opposes the cull – and biologist Tom Langton, who carried out the study, are now demanding the Government reveal whether Environment Secretary [George Eustice](#) was aware of the bid to interfere.

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Emails obtained via Freedom of Information requests reveal Miss Brown wrote to Suzanne Jarvis, editor-in-chief of the British Veterinary Association Journals, which publishes Vet Record, to ‘raise our grave concerns about this article as it ... has fundamental scientific flaws’.

In a highly unusual move, Miss Brown demanded comments from Defra were published ‘alongside this paper, to make clear the errors in the methodology’, adding: ‘If published as it stands... this would reflect badly on the British Veterinary Association and the Vet Record.’

Mr Langton said the move was ‘unethical and a serious offence’, adding: ‘The demanded changes... watered down the paper’s conclusions.

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What happened was a serious breach of academic publishing protocol.’ He called for Miss Brown to be suspended pending an inquiry.



The Vet Record agreed to publish a critical letter from Government chief vet Christine Middlemiss and Defra chief scientific adviser Gideon Henderson.

It also included data from Defra purporting to show higher rates of decline of bovine TB in areas with culling.

Defra later admitted some of this data had been calculated incorrectly.

Miss Jarvis said: 'We followed established editorial processes. All changes were agreed with the paper's authors.'

A spokesman for Defra said the paper's conclusions were 'wrong', adding: 'Any decision on publication... was made by Vet Record.'