

## Charity challenges farm union chief to withdraw accusations

Comments by Welsh Farmers Union president Gareth Vaughan have been described by a leading wildlife charity as scurrilous and totally unfounded, offensive to tens of thousands of conservationists across Britain.

Addressing his union's annual meeting at Aberystwyth, Mr Vaughan claimed the English Government's decision not to cull badgers was cowardly. It was an approach "based on cowering in the face of intimidation from animal rights extremists". Through threats and intimidation the extremists had "steered government policy away from what is in the best interests of human health and the taxpayer", he told delegates.

Challenging Mr Vaughan to withdraw his comments Badger Trust Chairman Dave Williams asked: "Who are the extremists? Around 47,000 people objected to badger culling when the government launched its consultation programme. Are they the extremists?"

"For almost 20 years Badger Trust (1) has argued that the badger-bTB controversy should be determined not by prejudice and unsupported claims but by high quality science. That's what we pressed for, that's what we got. We put our case to scientists, to Defra, to Commons select committees, to individual Government ministers. Are we the extremists?"

"What of the other major conservation charities, among them the RSPCA and the wildlife trusts. They, too, have argued long and hard against badger culling. Are they and their thousands of members extremists, too?"

"Of course not. Mr Vaughan's comments are absurd and offensive. The Government's decision was based on almost 10 years of peer-reviewed science and, yes, it also took into account public opinion. Mr Vaughan may not like the decision but to blame extremists invites widespread derision and anger.

"Yet more futile badger slaughtering is not the answer. Tougher more frequent testing as well as pre-movement testing, improved on-farm bio-security and ultimately vaccination is the way forward. It will take time. Unhappily there's no quick fix. But that's one of the unfortunate by-products of this long-running fatuous obsession with the alleged role of the badger in spreading what is, after all, a highly infectious, respiratory cattle disease."

Ends

(1) Previously known as the National Federation of Badger Groups.

Badger Trust is the only charity solely dedicated to the conservation of badgers across Great Britain.

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