Why have a badger culling trial?
TB in cattle is on the increase. The Krebs review found compelling evidence that badgers are a significant source of infection. The trial, alongside other work, is necessary to determine the circumstances in which badger culling can reduce TB in cattle. This should help us to control the disease more effectively, to the benefit of cattle, badgers, the farming community and the population as a whole.

The aims of the culling trial
- to provide clear evidence on the role that badgers play in TB in cattle and identify the conditions where culling badgers could be effective in preventing TB.
- to rigorously test the effect of different culling treatments, compared to no culling.
- to develop long term scientifically based sustainable policies to control TB in cattle.

Participation in the trial
Participation in the trial is voluntary. It is an important part of the Government’s strategy for reducing TB in cattle. With the help of everyone concerned the trial can establish the most appropriate way to control this serious disease in the interests of public health and for the benefit of cattle and badgers.

How the randomised trial will work
The trial will compare three badger treatments in 30 areas of around 100km² where TB cases have been high in the past. The areas will be grouped into 10 sets of 3 areas (triplets). Each area will be allocated a different, randomly selected, treatment.

The three treatments
- ‘proactive’ culling (where as many badgers as possible are removed from the whole area and the area is kept as clear as possible for the rest of the trial).
- ‘reactive’ culling (where badgers are only removed from social groups associated with farms where TB in cattle is confirmed).
- ‘survey only’ (where no badgers are culled but the land is surveyed for details of badger activity).

Badger welfare in the proactive and reactive areas
The trial gives full weight to badger welfare:
- capture of badgers will be by cage trapping, not snaring. Gassing will not be used.
- surveying and trapping will be by specially trained staff from MAFF’s Wildlife Unit.
- no culling will take place from 1 February to 30 April to minimise the capture of females which have dependent cubs that are still underground.

Identifying the trial areas (the triplets)
The trial will be in areas where the risk of TB is greatest. The first 6 areas are in Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Additional areas will be selected over the next 2 years using the latest information on TB outbreaks. Areas will be selected by the Independent Scientific Group overseeing the trial. Surveying for badger activity started in August 1998 in the first 6 areas.

Badger numbers
The total GB badger population and the number of badgers likely to be killed in the trial is uncertain. The Krebs report suggested that 12,500 badgers would be removed during the period of the trial, though some experts feel this is probably an underestimate. Recent reports suggest that badger numbers in GB are rising and have increased by around 77% since 1987, when the total population was estimated at 250,000. Culling will take place in less than 1% of the area of the country. This will not significantly affect the badger population in GB.

Culling outside the trial areas
Badgers are not an endangered species but are protected by law. In the absence of proof of the effectiveness of badger culling to control cattle TB, there is no justification for killing badgers for this reason except under trial conditions. Illegal culling of badgers may lead to prosecution.

Trial results
The Government is committed to making information about the trial widely available. The Independent Scientific Group will need time to assess results. Subject to the need to ensure that the premature release of data does not prejudice the outcome of the trial, data will be released as soon as possible.

The Government strategy to control TB in cattle
Government policy is based on three main principles: protecting public health, ensuring animals do not suffer unnecessarily, and sound science. The culling trial is an essential part of a package involving improved research to establish how the disease is transmitted, development of a vaccine and strengthened controls to prevent infection spreading between cattle. The policy is not to eradicate the badger but to control TB in cattle, enabling cattle and badgers to co-exist without posing a disease threat to each other.

More information is available from the MAFF TB Website on the Internet:
http://www.maff.gov.uk/animalh/tb/default.htm