

**Veterinary Service Animal Health Group**  
Information Communications Branch



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

**Our reference:** DAERA/24-321

[REDACTED]

Via email:

[REDACTED]@btinternet.com

VSAHG Information Communications Branch  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Jubilee House  
111 Ballykelly Road  
Limavady  
BT49 9HP

Email: [vsinfocommsbranch@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:vsinfocommsbranch@daera-ni.gov.uk)

Dear [REDACTED]

29 July 2024

## **Freedom of Information Act 2000**

Thank you for your request for information received by the Department on 05 July 2024, in which you sought the information in **bold** below.

The Department has now completed its search, and I can confirm that the Department holds some of the information requested.

**1. Please state the number of herd breakdowns in Northern Ireland that have been proven with certainty to have been solely the result of badger to cattle transmission.**

The number of herd breakdowns in Northern Ireland that have been proven with certainty to have been solely the result of badger to cattle transmission is zero.

*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**  
We invest in people Standard

Even with use of modern technologies such as whole-genome sequencing (WGS), it is impossible to categorically prove that transmission was the result of badger to cattle transmission under field conditions; this could only be done in an experimental situation.

Currently for any new bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) herd breakdown DAERA will genotype *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*), the bacterium responsible for bTB. This uses information from specific regions of its genome using a technique called Multiple-Locus Variable-Number Tandem Repeat Analysis (MLVA). Recent advances in molecular biology make it now feasible and cost-efficient to move to WGS which, although not currently used routinely, we envisage will be increasingly used in the future.

**2. Where figures of herd breakdowns proven to have been caused by badger to cattle transmission are provided, please detail the source(s) of the relevant data and the methodologies by which they have been derived.**

As outlined in the response to question 1 above it is currently not possible to provide these figures and so data and methodologies have not been supplied.

**3. Please state**

**(a) the proportion of bovine TB reactors found to have visible lesions at slaughter.**

For the time period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023 the proportion of bovine TB reactors found to have visible lesions at slaughter is 48.7%

**(b) the proportion of all cattle slaughtered, including reactors, found to have visible lesions at slaughter.**

For the time period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023 the proportion of all cattle slaughtered, including reactors, found to have visible lesions at slaughter is 2.4%

**(c) of all cattle slaughtered, the number that provide viable tissue samples for culture.**

Not all cattle that are slaughtered for bTB have samples submitted to the lab for culture. Samples are required to be submitted for animals with bTB like lesions found at routine slaughter, for animals that have had an inconclusive reaction to a tuberculin skin test and are slaughtered prior to a repeat tuberculin skin test to resolve their status, and for animals from new bTB breakdowns with singleton tuberculin skin test reactors that have no visible lesions at slaughter. In addition, current policy is that samples from up to three visibly lesioned animals in Officially Tuberculosis Withdrawn herds are submitted for culture. Figures for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023 are shown in the response to part (d) below.

**(d) the proportion of all bovine tissue samples taken at slaughter that provide viable *M. bovis* isolates suitable for whole genome sequencing analysis.**

*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**  
We invest in people Standard

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) received 8,638 submissions during the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023. AFBI isolated and confirmed *M. bovis* in approximately 70% of these cases. These *M. bovis* isolates were available for genotyping (MLVA). All cattle samples submitted were processed for culture and confirmation, no samples were excluded.

**(e) the proportion of *M. bovis* isolates that undergo successful whole genome sequencing analysis.**

AFBI has been an early-adopter of this technology and will increasingly transition from MLVA genotyping to WGS because of increased resolution, information content, and functionality. While WGS is not yet formally commissioned under the Assigned Work Programme (AWP), it has been used on rationally sampled data in various research & development projects, resulting in peer-reviewed publications.

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are unhappy with the way your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department. If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing [daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk) or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE, SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely,



**Veterinary Services Animal Health Group**

*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**<sup>®</sup>  
We invest in people Standard