

TB Partnership Steering Group

# Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland

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## Blueprint for Eradication



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

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

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## 1. MINISTER'S FOREWORD

The issue of bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) is the most difficult animal health challenge we face. It causes unacceptable hardship, stress and burden to farmers and their families. It impacts on the mental and physical well-being of our rural communities, and results in unsustainable costs to both industry, and to government.



I have been clear since becoming Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs that something must change. We need science led and evidence based solutions capable of delivering real and meaningful reductions in bTB levels. This needs to happen urgently and can only be progressed with both stakeholders and government working collaboratively together. It was why I established the TB Partnership Steering Group (TBPSG) earlier this year and am pleased to now endorse the Group's agreed Blueprint for bTB Eradication in Northern Ireland.

This document represents the culmination of extensive work by the TBPSG and I want to thank each and every member for their commitment and expertise. This document, and the work now required, represents a new, bold step forward for government-stakeholder cooperation in the fight against bTB maintenance and spread.

The Blueprint sets out the key priorities and actions to be further developed to tackle this disease and clearly identifies those measures where progress must be made in the immediate future across the three pillars of people, cattle and wildlife.

Eradication will not be easy and there is no quick fix. I am committed to working with the TBPSG and wider industry, to take the necessary decisions and seek change that will finally make a difference. DAERA officials will now work with the TBPSG to progress the timetable of actions, engaging closely with the newly established DAERA bTB Eradication Transformation Programme to develop recommendations for transformative policies to effectively control the disease and finally set Northern Ireland on a path to bTB eradication.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Andrew Muir'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the right.

Andrew Muir MLA  
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

## 2. TBPSG FOREWORD

The TBPSG wishes to state our collective and unwavering commitment to the eradication of bTB from Northern Ireland (NI). We recognise the critical importance of collaboration between industry, key stakeholders and government – we cannot afford to continue on the same path nor seek to tackle this highly complex challenge in isolation.

This comprehensive Blueprint, agreed by all of the stakeholder organisations listed below, is the result of extensive engagement, and builds on the recommendations within the Chief Veterinary Officer’s Review of bTB in NI of November 2024 and the DAERA Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Strategy for Northern Ireland, published in March 2022.

The Blueprint is founded on the principle that eradicating this disease requires a unified, multisectoral approach. It acknowledges where further engagement and assessment is needed, what actions can begin immediately and provides a robust basis for a transformative change to our approach to tackling bTB in NI over the short, medium and longer terms. It recognises that eradication will take time but provides the framework where eradication of bTB can now be realistically advanced.

Our shared commitment seeks to offer hope, build confidence and deliver results which will improve cattle and wildlife health and welfare, enhance farm efficiency and profitability, empower education initiatives, promote the application of advancing scientific knowledge, protect public health and maximise the use of veterinary expertise both inside and outside of government.

We look forward to working in partnership with the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, DAERA officials, and the new bTB Eradication Transformation Programme, as we urgently progress the necessary actions across the three pillars (People, Cattle, Wildlife) in our efforts to eradicate bTB.

**Membership of the TBPSG, which is chaired by Brian Dooher, is as follows:**

- Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland
- Dairy Council for Northern Ireland
- Livestock & Meat Commission for Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers’ Association
- Northern Ireland Badger Group

- Northern Ireland Livestock Auctioneers' Association
- Northern Ireland Meat Exporters' Association
- North of Ireland Veterinary Association
- Ulster Farmers' Union
- Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Ulster Wildlife

## 3. INTRODUCTION

### 3.1 Background

Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB), caused mainly by *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*), is a complex and challenging zoonotic disease (a disease that is transmissible from animals to humans) of cattle, endemic in many countries across the globe. Whilst primarily a disease of cattle, it also infects a broad range of farm and wild animals, further complicating attempts to control and eradicate the disease.

### 3.2 NI Context

A programme to eradicate bTB has been in place in Northern Ireland (NI) since the late 1950s. The current bTB programme, which is required under European law<sup>1</sup>, underpins the ability of NI's livestock sectors to trade with the European Union (EU) and internationally. In 2021, NI sales of processed food, internally and to external markets, were worth approximately £5.9 billion, of which sales of milk and milk products were estimated to be worth approximately £1.3 billion, and sales of beef and sheep meat products were just under £1.7 billion.

The current programme, which is approved by the European Commission, is based upon four key pillars:

- I. Detection and removal of infected animals through routine annual testing with the comparative intradermal tuberculin test (CITT; 'the skin test').
- II. Abattoir surveillance.
- III. Application of movement restrictions on infected herds for a minimum period of 4 months, and further testing to enable further identification and removal of infected animals to limit onward spread of infection.
- IV. Epidemiological investigation and supplementary testing for herds and individual animals considered at risk to bTB herd breakdowns.

In March 2022, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) launched the Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Strategy for Northern Ireland, consisting of a package of recommendations designed to achieve a sustained reduction and eventual eradication of bTB, based on work undertaken by the NI TB Strategic Partnership Group

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health ('Animal Health Law') and Commission Delegated Regulation 2020/689

(TBSPG) which reported in 2016, and two subsequent public consultations (in 2017/18 and 2021). However, the majority of the Strategy's recommendations have not yet been fully implemented and following a judicial review decision in October 2023 regarding the wildlife intervention action, that part of the strategy was quashed.

A [Review](#), led by Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) for NI, Brian Doohar, of our approach to bTB in NI was published in November 2024. Developed following consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders and experts, the review provides an overarching analysis of the bTB situation in NI. It outlines the corrective measures, which, if implemented holistically, should lead to the reduction and eventual eradication of bTB in NI.

Following receipt of the review, DAERA Minister, Andrew Muir, established a new government / stakeholder body - the TB Partnership Steering Group (TBPSG) - with its first task being to consider the review and advance the development of a plan for the control and eradication of bTB in collaboration with the department.

This Group, which met for the first time at the end of January 2025, consists of 11 key stakeholders including representatives from farming, veterinary, environmental, wildlife, animal processing and market sector groups. In addition, the group also contains representation from the Public Health Agency and includes ex-officio members from DAERA's Veterinary Service Animal Health Group (VSAHG) and is chaired by the CVO for NI.

This Blueprint marks the culmination of the efforts of the TBPSG to propose a new framework for both government and stakeholders to advance collective efforts to tackle, and eradicate, this costly disease.

### 3.3 Challenges

bTB has a complex epidemiology which presents significant challenges in relation to the control and eradication of the disease, a challenge that is shared by neighbouring jurisdictions across the UK and Republic of Ireland (ROI). The reasons for the complexity are based on a range of factors. These include the imperfect nature of the diagnostic tests available leading to residual infection in cattle herds and the potential for movement of undisclosed infected animals both between and within herds. This is further exacerbated by our high cattle density, trading practices and farming systems.

Tackling bTB effectively is further complicated by the persistence of *M.bovis* in the environment with *M.bovis* remaining viable for up to 6 months in faeces along with the fact that it can be transmitted to and from wildlife such as badgers and deer.



Furthermore, the lack of progress towards control and eradication of the disease has resulted in a widespread apathy and fatigue and generally low levels of stakeholder engagement and buy-in.

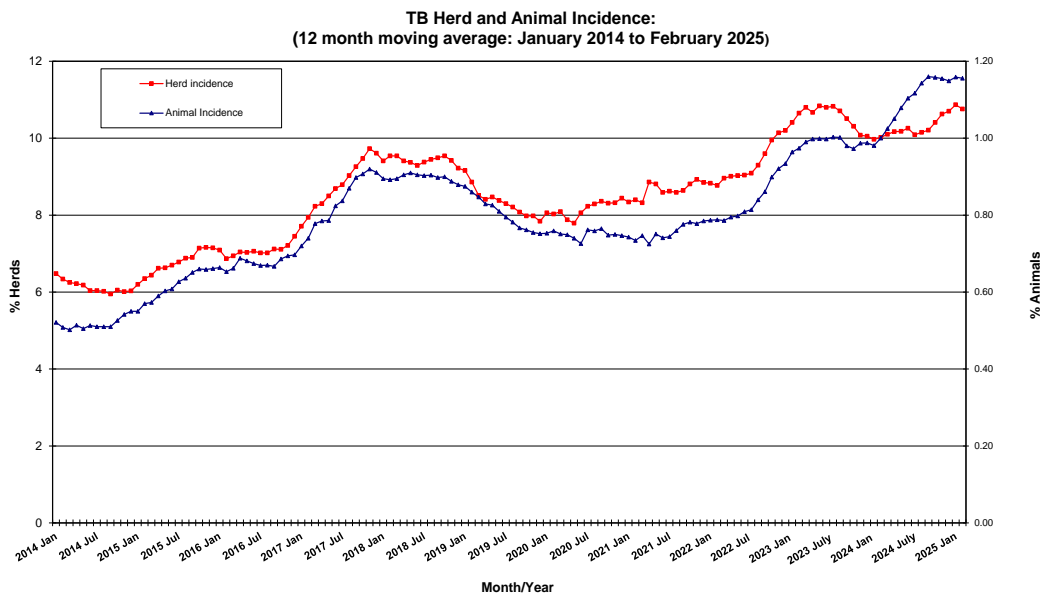
However, despite the significant challenges we face, controlling and eradicating bTB is possible and there are many examples of countries that have achieved officially bTB free (OTF) status. These include our neighbours in Scotland; European countries such as Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands; and other countries such as New Zealand and Australia.

Collaborative working between government, industry and other stakeholders to develop and implement measures, using general disease control principles and availing of best practice from those aforementioned countries that have successfully eradicated bTB, will be fundamental to placing NI on the pathway to eradication.

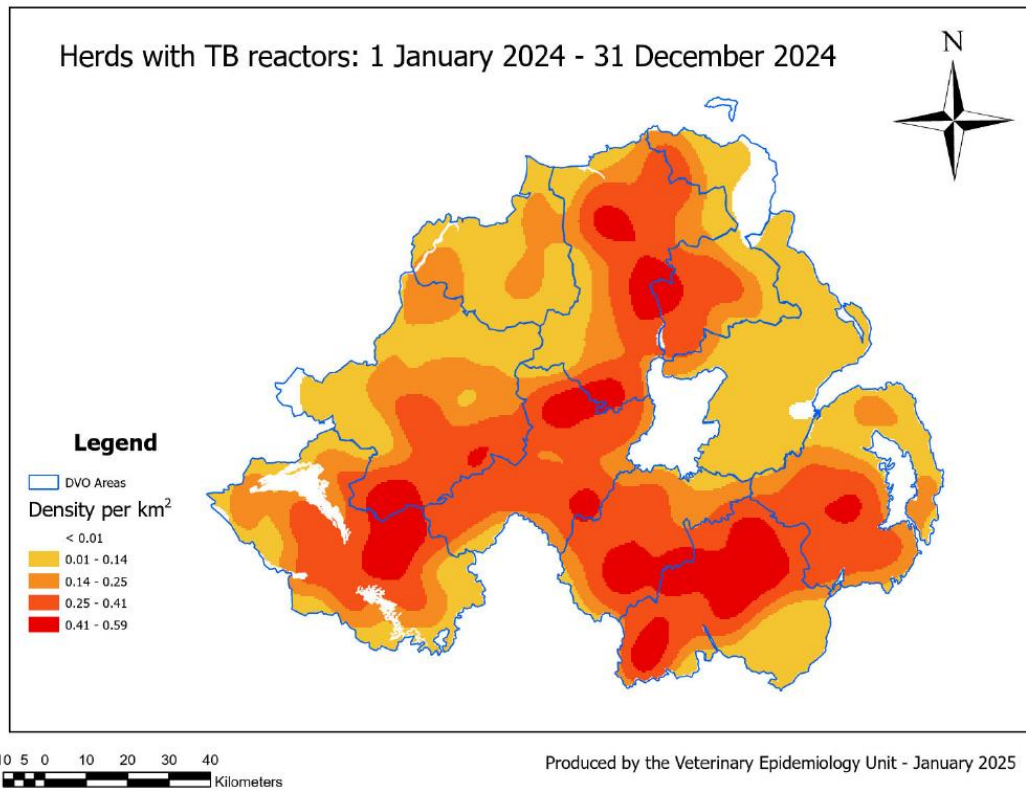
### 3.4 Impact

The challenges presented, have had an obvious consequential impact on NI’s bTB disease landscape, leading to substantial increases in both animal and herd incidence.

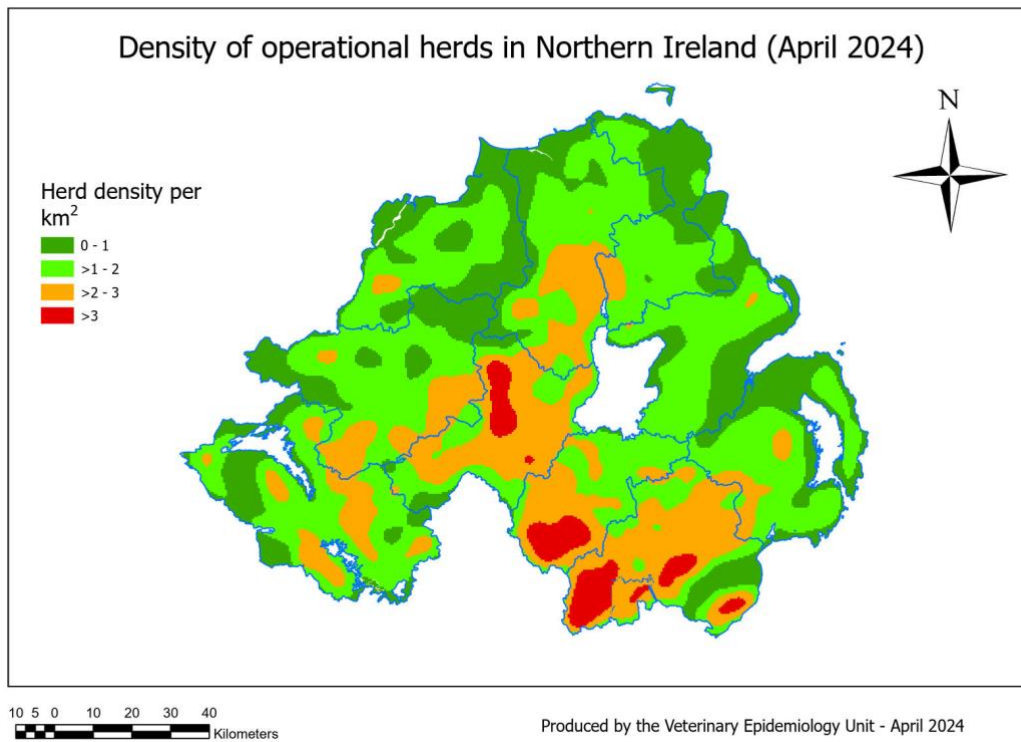
In recent years, there has been a significant deterioration in the bTB situation. As of February 2025, the herd and animal incidence rates were 10.76% and 1.156% respectively (Figure 1), with a significant increase over the past 5 years in particular.



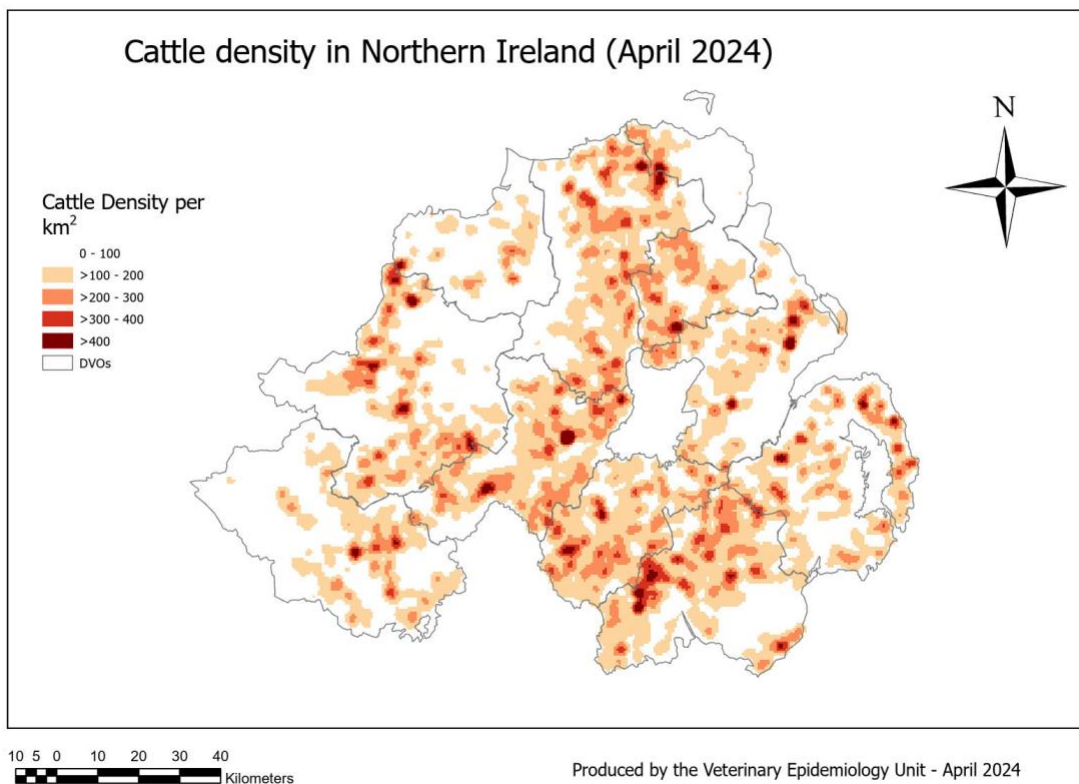
**Figure 1:** Annual bTB animal and herd incidence in NI since 2014.



**Figure 2:** NI bTB heat map



**Figure 3:** NI operational herd density map



**Figure 4:** NI cattle density map

It is acknowledged that the disease picture in NI does not compare favourably with neighbouring jurisdictions. In the Republic of Ireland, while disease rates have also been increasing in recent years, herd incidence for 2024 stood at 6.00% (up from 4.83% in 2023).

In Great Britain, herd incidence is calculated by dividing the total number of new incidents by the total amount of time (in hundreds of years) that tested herds were unrestricted and at-risk of infection since the end of their last TB incident or negative herd test, rather than the total number of tests carried out on those herds. This is different from NI and RoI where herd incidence reflects the number of new reactor herds in the past 12 months and makes direct comparisons difficult.

Scotland, which has Officially bTB Free status, had a herd incidence rate of 0.6% in 2024 (unchanged from 2023), while herd incidence in Wales was also unchanged in 2024 at 6.8%. In England, the overall herd incidence rate in 2024 was 7.7% (up from 7.3% in 2023). In its high incidence area (in south and west England), herd incidence stood at 13.7%, up from 13.3% in 2023.

More detail on the disease picture elsewhere in the UK and Ireland can be found at:

[Quarterly bTB in cattle in Great Britain statistics notice: December 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

Maps showing bTB breakdowns in England and Wales can also be viewed at

<https://www.ibtb.co.uk/>

In the Republic of Ireland, DAFM publish its statistics at: [gov.ie - National Bovine TB Statistics](#).

As the epidemiological disease situation in NI has deteriorated, there has also been a corresponding increase in the level of public expenditure required to tackle the disease. In the 2023/24 financial year, total departmental bTB Programme expenditure was £55.7m, representing a rise of 39% since 2020/21 (with the rise in compensation costs being the most substantial contributor to programme costs/expenditure). Public expenditure on tackling the disease is expected to reach £60m for the 2024/25 financial year.

It needs to be acknowledged that the cost of bTB goes well beyond the direct financial cost mentioned above. A number of particular features stand out including the consequential losses associated with the loss of productive animals, disruption to business continuity and farm financial sustainability. In addition, the negative impact on the environmental sustainability of the sector, and perhaps more importantly, the significant negative impact that bTB has on the physical and mental health and general well-being of farmers and farming families across NI.

The uncertainty caused by outbreaks, the anticipation of an outbreak, and the potential loss of animals has a significant detrimental impact on farming families, and they experience a range of symptoms from stress, anxiety, depression and a diminished sense of control over their farm businesses. Often the long-term physical, emotional and financial impact of bTB outweighs having to deal with the shorter-term impact of a disease outbreak. This is particularly evident in those farm businesses experiencing prolonged and recurrent breakdowns.

The zoonotic potential of bTB should also not be overlooked with the farming community at a slightly increased risk of infection. Although the overall risk of acquiring bTB remains very low, there were three bTB cases reported in NI in 2024.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [TB still on the increase in Northern Ireland | HSC Public Health Agency](#)

## 4. TURNING THE CURVE: A TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH TO TB ERADICATION

### 4.1 TBPSG Vision

*The TBPSG has committed to the immediate and future work now needed to tackle bTB in NI. The collective vision agreed by the Group is as follows:*

***“To bring forward transformative new, effective and evidence-based solutions capable of reducing and then eradicating bovine tuberculosis”.***

Bovine TB is generally regarded as the most difficult and intractable animal disease challenge currently facing the UK and ROI. Controlling and eradicating the disease in NI is complex and, whilst there is no simple ‘quick fix’, the TBPSG believes that taking a holistic, multifaceted approach that effectively addresses all sources of infection, transmission pathways and factors that contribute to persistence of the disease in the environment, cattle and wildlife, in conjunction with addressing human and behavioural factors, will achieve our vision.

Working together we will reduce and then eradicate bTB, by using the wealth of our collective experience to ‘control the controllables’ using all of the tools currently available to us. We will seek solutions to provide farmers with information that enables them to make their own decisions on the basis of risk, make bTB an integral part of herd health planning and bring a renewed focus to preventing new infections.

### 4.2 Aims, Objectives and Benefits

**The aim of the TBPSG, working with DAERA, is to reduce bTB herd incidence by 2% by 2030, placing NI on a pathway to halve current bTB levels by 2040 and achieve eradication by 2050.**

The measures we put in place will require significant changes and are likely to present many challenges, with some taking longer to fully implement than others. However, once all of the proposed measures we endorse in this Blueprint for eradication have been implemented holistically, we expect to see a significant reduction in the disease, with disease rates halving by 2040 on the eventual pathway to eradication.

Eradicating bTB in NI will require a holistic, unified ‘One Health’ approach that recognises the interconnectedness between animal, human and environmental health and takes action across all of these areas.

Likewise, taking a 'One Health' approach that places NI on a pathway towards eventual eradication will deliver significant cross cutting benefits to people, animals and the environment.



Fewer breakdowns and consequential losses will help to address the stress, mental health and financial challenges experienced by farming families in dealing with the disease.

A reduction in disease rates will also bring about more efficient production at a reduced cost to industry, leading to a more sustainable and resilient agri-food sector, whilst also creating increased trading opportunities as a result of an improved animal health and biosecurity status for NI. Lower disease rates will also have a significant positive impact on the health and welfare of both livestock and the surrounding wildlife.

In the longer term, reducing bTB will also have a positive economic impact, significantly reducing the cost to the public purse of tackling the disease, helping to reduce emissions and lower the carbon footprint of the industry on the pathway towards Net Zero.

### 4.3 Principles

The TBPSG is a Government / Stakeholder body - it is part of the overall bTB programme. It will work to see the aims, objectives and benefits achieved by working in partnership to develop and secure Ministerial agreement for implementation as soon as possible of a holistic package of effective, evidence-based measures with shared ownership, based on the principles of:

- prompt detection of disease;
- eliminating disease where found; and
- protecting disease free herds.

The TBPSG will be responsible for determining its future work programme and goal setting aligned with the key priorities as outlined in this document. This may be via specific working groups within the TBPSG itself and in other aspects of work where wider DAERA (or other key stakeholders) and the TBPSG agree to work together.

Its outputs and recommendations will all be subject to Ministerial agreement and further Departmental consideration by the DAERA bTB Eradication Transformation Programme Board which has been established to ensure robust governance surrounds the implementation of the Blueprint. This will ensure that new, effective and evidence-based solutions capable of reducing and then eradicating bTB arising from collaboration with TBPSG can be incorporated into DAERA operations to deliver impact from a legislative, resource and financial perspective.

### 4.4 Making it Happen

To realise our Vision, achieve our aims and objectives, and deliver these benefits, we need to take a fresh approach to tackle bTB. This will require DAERA to put in place new cross cutting governance structures to deliver improved oversight and greater transparency, ensuring the Department takes a joined up, policy coherent approach to tackle the disease holistically.

- **Collaboration, Co-Design & Communications:** The Department should deliver a collaborative, partnership-based approach for eradication, with shared ownership by government, industry and stakeholders. To achieve this, the TBPSG, bringing together DAERA Veterinary Service Animal Health Group officials, representatives from a range of stakeholders across the agri-food industry, veterinarians, animal welfare organisations, and the wildlife sector, has already been established. The TBPSG will work with the DAERA bTB Eradication Transformation Programme Board to shape the future of bTB eradication in NI by adopting an outward looking approach, learning from good practice across the world and building on their successes, ensuring all changes are supported by a robust package of communications and future work plans that make stakeholders fully aware of the new measures and helps shape future policy.
- **Education & Training:** The Department should develop and implement a package of education and knowledge transfer measures and deliver enhanced training for all stakeholders involved in the bTB testing process, including vets.
- **Science and Research & Development:** Provision of up to date, accurate scientific advice, research and innovation is essential for developing new methods and

strategies for eradicating bTB. Decisions on the best way forward, particularly where there are competing stakeholder views, should be informed by evidence. Decisions should be based on the best science available therefore the TBPSG seeks that DAERA continues to invest in science, and commission research and development that supports evidence based policy-making in tackling bTB in NI (using experience and best practice of other regions).

- **Capacity & Capability:** DAERA should enhance its capability and capacity to respond to new policy challenges, new technologies and new ways of working to adopt new measures that reduce and then eradicate bTB in NI. VSAHG in particular, working with other TBPSG members, should adapt current working practices, adopting an agile approach to ensure resources are utilised effectively, acknowledging the constrained resource environment within which it operates.
- **Financial Sustainability:** The TBPSG, working within the wider DAERA bTB Eradication Transformation Programme, will develop proposals that reduce bTB. It is intended that this will lead to more efficient production, at a reduced cost, through a need 'to spend to save' approach, that supports the financial sustainability of the agri-food industry. Through good financial planning, DAERA should make the best use of its budgets, targeting funding where it will have the most impact, making sure that all proposals take account of the prevailing public expenditure context and are affordable within it. DAERA should consider how best to drive disease levels down to reduce the longer-term reliance on public funding, ensuring there is a fair and just transition that protects financial sustainability as measures are introduced.
- **Legislation:** Partnership working will ensure stakeholders have an opportunity to shape coherent policies and measures with the shared goal of reducing and then eradicating bTB, and the TBPSG will work to enable the progression of legislative proposals, for Ministerial consideration, that would give effect to these measures and also help NI to meet other legislative obligations, for example, in relation to Animal Health Law.
- **Technology:** Leveraging data and technology will play a pivotal role in our approach. By implementing advanced data analytics and digitally enhanced services, we can gain deeper insights into disease patterns, helping to make data driven improvements that streamline our activities and inform future policy interventions. The TBPSG will work with the DAERA bTB Eradication Transformation Programme to ensure



utilisation of technology to improve the visibility of relevant performance reporting on overall progress towards the eradication of bTB across new and existing measures, including an assessment of whether they provide value for money and are effective in terms of disease reduction and eradication.

## 5. DELIVERING THE BLUEPRINT

### 5.1 Overview

To achieve our Vision of reducing and then eradicating bTB in NI, we will bring forward transformative new measures as soon as possible in order to deliver our aims and objectives. Some of the measures we are proposing will be delivered in the short to medium term, whilst others will require longer-term design, development and delivery.

We will develop these measures in close collaboration with the DAERA bTB Eradication Transformation Programme, wider industry, and other experts, while recognising where there is a need for public consultation before Ministerial agreement is sought, and ensuring that we take account of the prevailing public expenditure context before they are implemented.

To truly turn the curve on bTB, we will progress our Blueprint along the following fundamental measures:

➤ **Enhanced disease surveillance & testing programmes, including Private Veterinary Practitioner (PVP) and DAERA Veterinary staff training:**

Recognising the complexities and challenges associated with detecting bTB, we will work to introduce new measures for enhanced disease surveillance, testing programmes and case management based on best practice in other countries, using research & development and developing a regionalised approach that ensures it is effective for NI. We recognise the invaluable work carried out by the DAERA Veterinarians in providing advice to herd keepers, and to build on that we will also seek to place Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs) at the heart of the eradication programme, recognising that they have the key relationship with the farmer, by ensuring they both receive the best possible information from the department and necessary training to assist them in delivery of our efforts to bTB eradication. This approach will ensure PVPs and DAERA Veterinarians are best placed to advise herd keepers on the risk to their herd and the mitigating measures they can take.

➤ **Regionalisation:** We will work to develop and pilot a regionalised approach for the implementation of novel measures, including new partnership working, using the results as a 'proof of concept' for deploying any such measures on a country wide basis. Rolling out measures on a regional basis will enable us to utilise resources more efficiently to assess the impact of the interventions on subpopulations within that region.

- **Enhanced Herd Health & Biosecurity measures:** We will work to ensure that the risk of spread of bTB from neighbouring herds, between herds and local wildlife is mitigated by improved biosecurity. We will seek to enhance communications and education on the importance of good biosecurity and will develop proposals to provide farmers with information – from both government and key stakeholders - that enables them to make informed decisions around the purchasing of animals.
- **Wildlife:** The TBPSG will work to inform development and delivery of effective wildlife interventions, using an evidence-based approach to develop policy and measures for Ministerial consideration that mitigate against the spread of bTB to and from any wildlife reservoirs.
- **Herds with prolonged or recurring breakdowns:** A significant number of herds suffer from prolonged and recurrent breakdowns, often with large numbers of infected animals, putting farm businesses under significant pressure and stress (mental, emotional and financial), whilst also presenting an enhanced risk to any other herds epidemiologically linked to them. To tackle this, we will bring forward a range of measures, including seeking the establishment of a DAERA led taskforce that considers how best to support farmers to remove infection from their herds and prevent its reintroduction on a case-by-case basis.




TBPSG will also work with the wider DAERA bTB Eradication Transformation Programme to develop further proposals for Ministerial consideration. These will aim to address the unsustainable cost of the programme, including considering options for reforming compensation to ensure it aligns with established disease control measures, ensuring there is a fair and just transition that protects financial sustainability for farmers if changes are introduced. We will seek actions that drive positive behavioural changes, reduce fraud and minimise the financial impact of fraudulent activity. Lastly, we will advance exploration of options for support for farmers suffering a bTB breakdown and where financial support above compensation payable could be beneficial.

### 5.2 Delivery Plan




The Delivery Plan for the Blueprint below sets out the actions to be progressed along with an indicative timeframe when this work would be expected to be completed. It is recognised that should actions progress well, implementation may take place earlier than that anticipated below (e.g. workstream actions move from an activity expected in the medium term towards one that begins in the short term). This is further underpinned by acknowledging the requirement to be flexible and work in an agile manner as resources permit across all workstreams thereby maximising delivery potential.

Similarly, it is recognised that many of the actions below have a degree of interdependence and should not be viewed in isolation outside the context of the wider plan. It remains the goal to implement new bTB measures in a holistic manner.




It is clearly acknowledged that the TBPSG are seeking further engagement, cooperation and discussion on the areas below aligned with the agreed timelines. Only once further assessment has been given will the Group provide a view on whether a proposal should advance for implementation subject to Ministerial agreement, and, if so, its view on how that proposal might be applied from both a policy and operational perspective.

CATEGORY	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONGER TERM
<b>PEOPLE, PARTNERSHIP &amp; SCIENCE - CHANGING THE CULTURE</b>			
Governance & Partnership Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Establish new TB Partnership Steering Group.</b></li> <li>❖ Establish new cross cutting governance structures.</li> </ul>		
Independent Science Advice / Research & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Evaluate options and develop strategy for the provision of independent science advice that will inform bTB eradication in NI. Implement preferred options.</li> <li>❖ Identify future research priorities in partnership with TB Partnership Steering Group.</li> <li>❖ Consider partnerships with neighbouring jurisdictions to maximise impact of research.</li> <li>❖ Formulate proposals for bTB related research projects under One Health commissioning process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Evaluate and review recently completed research projects to ensure their outputs are used to inform the development of future policy and eradication measures.</li> </ul>	
Intergovernmental Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Establish CVO led North-South bTB eradication forum.</li> <li>❖ Establish UK &amp; Ireland CVO forum for bTB eradication.</li> </ul>		





## Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland – Blueprint for Eradication

CATEGORY	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONGER TERM
Culture	❖ Develop & deliver enhanced communications strategy in partnership with stakeholders.	❖ Continue to deliver enhanced communications in partnership with stakeholders.	 CONTINUED IMPLEMENTATION
Education & Knowledge Transfer	❖ Develop & commence implementation of an education and knowledge transfer programme for both industry and herd keepers, with a focus on practical ways to mitigate against disease entry and transmission, through seminars, training courses and online information to support bTB eradication.	❖ Continue to implement a targeted knowledge transfer programme, incorporating any new measures and learning from feedback to increase its effectiveness.	 CONTINUED IMPLEMENTATION
Programme Measures & Indicators	❖ Review programme disease measurements and indicators, including how they are shared and communicated both internally and externally, to support data driven decision making & continuous improvement.	 CONTINUED IMPLEMENTATION	

## Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland – Blueprint for Eradication




CATEGORY	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONGER TERM
<b>CATTLE INTERVENTIONS</b>			
Field Surveillance & Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Develop enhanced training for all vets involved in the bTB testing process, including awareness of the need for compliance with proper cold storage and transport of tuberculin.</li> <li>❖ Review criteria used to monitor testing performance and roll out increased surveillance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review the effectiveness of enhanced training, learning from feedback to increase its effectiveness.</li> <li>❖ Review effectiveness of enhanced monitoring and supervision of tests and incorporate lessons learned to increase effectiveness.</li> </ul>	
Abattoir Surveillance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Deliver refresher training for all staff to ensure abattoir surveillance is vigorously applied.</li> </ul>		
Interferon Gamma (IFNg) Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review criteria for IFNg testing and evaluate possibility of introducing compulsory IFNg testing, with initial target of 24,000 tests per annum to protect herds from future risk of bTB breakdowns.</li> <li>❖ Deliver pilot that extends testing window from 8 hours to 24 hours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Evaluate potential for introduction of a compulsory target to at least 36,000 tests per annum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Evaluate potential for introduction of a compulsory target to at least 45,000 tests per annum.</li> </ul>
Criteria for Officially Tuberculosis Free (OTF) Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Undertake preliminary work to consider the criteria for suspending or withdrawing OTF status, including legal advice as appropriate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Continue to develop proposals, incorporating legal advice, on the feasibility of further restricting herds.</li> </ul>	

## Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland – Blueprint for Eradication




CATEGORY	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONGER TERM
Inconclusive Skin Reactors (ICs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Develop and deliver proposals for managing inconclusive skin reactors.</li> </ul>		
Full & Partial Depopulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review depopulation policy, evaluate and implement proposals for restocking following depopulation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review effectiveness of earlier proposals for restocking following depopulation, incorporating lessons learned to make improvements.</li> </ul>	
Restocking after bTB Breakdown and Application of Severe Breakdown status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review criteria for the application of severe herd restrictions and associated impacts as regards to restocking.</li> <li>❖ Evaluate and implement risk based options for restocking breakdown herds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review effectiveness of earlier proposals for restocking breakdown herds, incorporating lessons learned to make improvements.</li> </ul>	
Herds with prolonged and recurring breakdowns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Establish Taskforce to conduct an in-depth epidemiological investigation in herds with prolonged and recurring breakdowns and develop bespoke interventions and advice.</li> <li>❖ Develop and implement pilot based on advice from the Taskforce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review effectiveness, incorporate lessons learned and consider further roll out of Taskforce support service.</li> </ul>	
Whole Genome Sequencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Work with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute to expand and make greater use of data to better understand transmission pathways and support breakdown case management.</li> <li>❖ Explore possibility for pilot projects to drive this forward.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Integrate whole genome sequencing into case management and epidemiological investigations.</li> <li>❖ Review any possible pilot project and integrate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Consider further advances in genetic analysis to ensure bTB programme has available the full range of epidemiological information to make informed decisions on existing and future disease intervention strategies.</li> </ul>




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CATEGORY	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONGER TERM
Use of private/alternative tests by herd keepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Engage with Defra and DAFM regarding ongoing work on alternative testing strategies.</li> <li>❖ Develop alternative testing policy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Explore potential for alternative test research trial.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review findings and consider further roll out.</li> </ul>
Pembrokeshire project trial & risk rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Monitor and review the progress of the project and consider whether any lessons can be learned for NI bTB policy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Consider if the delivered outputs would benefit the NI bTB programme.</li> <li>❖ Explore potential to trial a similar farmer and vet led concept for NI.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Consider options around categorisation of bTB risks of animals in conjunction with other herd health parameters.</li> </ul>
Machine Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Explore the potential to develop proposals to utilise artificial intelligence, machine learning and disease modelling systems to identify high risk animals/herds and advance scenario planning interventions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Seek to implement any relevant proposals, advancing opportunities to build or adopt modelling to predict herds and animals that were infected with bTB by incorporating data directly and indirectly related to the animal's bTB infection risk.</li> </ul>	
Breakdown Case Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review current bTB case management approach, (including deployment of adequate resources) and develop veterinary led proposals to improve current approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review effectiveness of earlier proposals, incorporating lessons learned to improve approach.</li> </ul>	
Legislative powers to test non-bovines for bTB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Draft legislation to extend non-bovine testing powers to farms with no cattle present (e.g. those contiguous to cattle farms).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Subject to consultation, progress the necessary legislative amendments.</li> </ul>	




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CATEGORY	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONGER TERM
Restrictions and risk-based trading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Evaluate options for pre &amp; post movement testing and develop proposals to ensure compliance with legislative requirements.</li> <li>❖ Develop &amp; commence implementation of proposals for informed purchasing, including information sharing and mapping requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Evaluate effectiveness of earlier proposals, incorporating lessons learned to improve approach.</li> <li>❖ Explore options for further sharing of information on bTB herd classification.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Consider potential for the introduction of additional restrictions.</li> <li>❖ Continue to evaluate effectiveness of earlier proposals, incorporating lessons learned to improve approach.</li> </ul>
Movements out of bTB breakdown herds under certain conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review criteria for Alternative Control Herds (ACH) and roll out ACH approvals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review effectiveness of earlier proposals, incorporating lessons learned to improve approach.</li> </ul>	
Genetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Explore the potential to promote breeding for bTB resistance through engagement with industry and the Ruminant Genetics Programme.</li> <li>❖ Advance genetics knowledge transfer and communications strategy.</li> </ul>		
Herd Health Management & Biosecurity Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Develop proposals for providing biosecurity advice by/to industry and aligning herd health &amp; biosecurity with other DAERA animal health programmes &amp; wider programmes.</li> <li>❖ Implement a fit for purpose biosecurity assessment protocol.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review effectiveness of earlier proposals, incorporating lessons learned to improve approach.</li> <li>❖ Consider proposals that align herd health &amp; biosecurity with other DAERA programmes and industry programmes and priorities.</li> </ul>	


## Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland – Blueprint for Eradication

CATEGORY	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONGER TERM
Capital grants for safe and effective on farm testing facilities and biosecurity improvements	❖ Explore options for providing grant aid to improve animal handling/testing facilities and to undertake works aimed at improving biosecurity as part of the wider DAERA sustainable agriculture programme	❖ Subject to finance availability, implement scheme	
Statutory Biosecurity Improvement Notices	❖ Explore options for minimising disease spread through poor biosecurity practices.	❖ Further develop options, bring for Ministerial consideration and legislate as appropriate on the preferred approach.	❖ Proceed to implement and operationalise any agreed measures relating to Biosecurity Improvement Notices.
Farm Fragmentation	❖ Explore options for minimising disease spread from farm fragmentation.	❖ Further develop options, bring for Ministerial consideration and legislate as appropriate on the preferred approach.	❖ Proceed to implement and operationalise any agreed measures.


## Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland – Blueprint for Eradication

CATEGORY	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONGER TERM
<b>WILDLIFE</b>			
Wildlife Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Bring forward proposals for effective, evidence-based wildlife interventions and TBPSG views for consideration by Minister.</li> <li>❖ Consult on proposals as agreed by the Minister and taking into account requirements from the Judicial Review decision of October 2023.</li> <li>❖ Following Ministerial consideration, progress any possible necessary legislation to give effect to preferred approach and commence implementation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Continue to implement and operationalise any agreed measures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Continue to implement and operationalise any agreed measures.</li> </ul>
Badger RTA Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Develop strategies and policies to optimise use of data arising from badger RTA survey to enable evidence-based decision making.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Implement any agreed policy.</li> </ul>	
Badger Sett App	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Develop and launch a secure, user-friendly App that enables farmers and the public to record badger setts.</li> </ul>		
Role of Deer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Develop proposals to evaluate further the role of deer in the transmission and persistence of bTB.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Consider and agree proposals and commence preparation for implementation.</li> </ul>	

**Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland – Blueprint for Eradication**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>SHORT TERM</b> ❖ (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026)	<b>MEDIUM TERM</b> ❖ (1 April 2026 – 31 March 2028)	<b>LONGER TERM</b> (1 April 2028 – 31 March 2030)
<b>REGIONALISATION</b>			
Regionalised Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Develop a ‘Proof of Concept’ pilot for delivering a holistic package of measures (wildlife, cattle, people) on a regionalised basis.</li> <li>❖ Commence preparations for roll out</li> <li>❖ Commence implementation of regionalised pilot approach.</li> </ul>		

## Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland – Blueprint for Eradication

CATEGORY	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONGER TERM
<b>FINANCE</b>			
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Consider and evaluate options for financial sustainability for both farm businesses and government, including the potential reform of compensation.</li> <li>❖ TBPSG will explore possible options for financial support, beyond compensation for cattle slaughtered for disease control, to farmers experiencing a bTB breakdown.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Consult on potential proposals for the reform of compensation and finance reform of the Programme, seek Ministerial endorsement and prepare legislative basis for any agreed proposals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Proceed to implement and operationalise any agreed measures.</li> </ul>
Fraud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Review existing control measures and develop proposals that ensure that all available tools and enforcement activities are being fully utilised to deter and mitigate the risk of any fraudulent activity.</li> </ul>		

## **6. NEXT STEPS**

### **6.1 Reviewing Delivery**

Delivery against this Blueprint will be subject to regular review, and an annual update will be published by the Department.

### **6.2 Disease Monitoring**

We will develop improved performance reporting on overall Departmental progress towards the eradication of bTB and the impact on disease trends will be monitored through regular analysis and reports, which will be published on the DAERA website.

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and Rural Affairs**

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agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

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