

Chapter 9

Conclusions &
Recommendations

9.1 Introduction

The context in which the Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Programme (BTEP) operates and the measures that comprise it have been set out in the literature review accompanying this report and in the introductory chapter. Succeeding chapters have attempted to address the core evaluative questions that are posed in a Value for Money Review, which relate to:

- The rationale for the programme's existence;
- The efficiency with which it is operated;
- The effectiveness with which it is operated and;
- The continuing relevance of the programme.

Chapters 2-8 discussed various aspects of these questions, presenting findings and bringing forward conclusions and recommendations, as appropriate. This concluding chapter collates these conclusions and recommendations under the headings of the four principal evaluative questions.

9.2. Programme rationale

9.2.1 Conclusions

- The rationale for the existence of a programme for the eradication of bovine tuberculosis is strong, deriving from its ability to: (i) ensure that access to export markets for Irish cattle and their products is unimpeded by the continuing presence in this country of bovine TB; (ii) reduce the impact of tuberculosis-related animal productivity losses, and; (iii) provide additional safeguards that help protect our human population from this important zoonosis.

- Programme objectives are congruent with government strategy for the agricultural and wider economy, but alignment with horizontal guidelines for policy development could be improved by incorporating quantitative elements into the interim objective.
- The existence of significant market failures in the eradication of bovine tuberculosis justifies public intervention in the Programme.
- The level of public participation in the BTEP in the period under review can be regarded as appropriate, when account is taken of the market conditions facing cattle farmers over that time.
- The extent to which programme delivery is outsourced is appropriate and the range of quality control measures in place is sufficient to guarantee an adequate standard of governance and the quality of inputs and outputs. No opportunities for extending the use of outsourcing can currently be identified.

9.2.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (Chapter2)

The interim objective of the programme, previously articulated, should be clarified by the following statement:

“As long as the constraint imposed by the existence of an infected wildlife reservoir continues to exist, progress towards the interim objective will be considered adequate if the herd incidence, the absolute number of reactor animals and the number of reactor animals per thousand animal tests (APT) continue to follow a declining trend, as represented by the respective five-year exponential moving averages. The interim objective will be formally reassessed in 2013, at which time it is expected that research into badger vaccination will have reached a point that will enable projections to be made as to its likely long-term impact on bovine tuberculosis”.

Recommendation 2 (Chapter 3)

The Department should keep under review the level at which costs are shared between the state and the private sector in the delivery of the Programme with a view to achieving an appropriate level of private sector participation.

Recommendation 3 (Chapter 3)

The Department should keep under review the extent to which outsourcing is used in the delivery of the Programme in order to ensure that it does not fall below the high level currently obtaining. Decisions with regard to the further use of outsourcing should have regard to the practicability and cost-effectiveness of any proposed changes and take account of the need to ensure equity, good governance and the maintenance of critical core capacity.

9.3 Programme efficiency

Chapters 4 and 5 undertook an examination of the various aspects of efficiency, including *economy, throughput, quality, the timeliness and completeness* with which outputs are produced, and the *allocation of resources* within the programme. Chapter 8 examined the issues of both efficiency and effectiveness from an action perspective, evaluating the degree to which improvements in either might be achieved by the adoption of alternative policy or organisational approaches.

9.3.1 Conclusions

- The various outputs of the Bovine TB Eradication Programme are clearly definable in both qualitative and quantitative terms. They are generally delivered in a timely and complete manner, and in compliance with the provisions of domestic and European legislation.
- The sharing of the costs of the Programme with its principal beneficiaries, together with a steady reduction in disease levels from 1999 onwards, significantly mitigated public expenditure on bovine TB eradication over the period under review.
- The allocation of resources within the Programme is generally appropriate and well aligned with its interim and long-term objectives.

- The unit costs of the various programme measures are generally in line with or below those pertaining in the benchmark jurisdictions.
- Bovine Disease Levies are an appropriate mechanism for sharing the costs of the Programme between the State and the farming sector, which is the main beneficiary of the programme. However, significant variation in the level of contribution to the cost of compensation is detrimental to the proper operation of this cost sharing system and should be minimised.
- The existence of a range of quality control measures provides assurance as to the probity of the various compensation mechanisms and the tuberculin testing programme.
- The retention of the Reactor Collection Service is justifiable, but its efficiency could be improved by reducing the need for direct involvement by Department staff in its routine operation.
- Notwithstanding recent reductions in the overall staff complement, it is clear that the BTEP incurs a substantial staff cost. While these relatively high costs may be largely attributable to the scale and inherent complexity of the Programme, it is likely to be the case that continuing advances in technology, changes in the dynamics of the disease, or the adoption of novel methods of Programme delivery may provide scope for achieving further efficiencies in the use of the staff resource.
- While the economic benefits of utilising non-veterinarians to deliver some, or all, of the TB testing programme would appear to be limited, and while veterinary resources would currently seem to be sufficient to meet the demands for intradermal testing, it may, nonetheless, be prudent for the Department to clearly establish the legal position relating to the use of lay testers in this jurisdiction and to actively monitor international developments in this regard.
- Ensuring that field interventions by Department staff are carried out in a cost-effective manner is key to enhancing the overall efficiency of the Programme.

9.3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 4 (Chapter 5)

The rates of Bovine Disease Levies payable should be set on an annual basis, using a multi-annual average, so as to provide for a minimum of 50% of the estimated ongoing cost of reactor compensation.

Recommendation 5 (Chapter 5)

The existing quality control measures in the Programme should be retained and, where appropriate, strengthened. In particular, a Code of Practice for Valuers should be implemented following the completion of consultation.

Recommendation 6 (Chapter 5)

Given the dynamic nature of animal diseases and the ongoing development of technological resources, the staff complement and its deployment should be kept under active review to ensure that the Programme is delivered in the most efficient manner possible.

Recommendation 14 (Chapter 8)

The Department should clearly establish the legal position and the opinion of the Veterinary Council of Ireland in relation to the use of lay testers and should actively monitor international developments in this regard.

Recommendation 15 (Chapter 8)

The Department should scale back involvement by technical staff in the on-farm aspects of the Reactor Collection Service, limiting such involvement to particularly problematic cases and the undertaking of quality control inspections on a small percentage of reactor collections.

Recommendation 16 (Chapter 8)

The Department should keep the rationale for field activities undertaken as part of the BTEP under constant review and should ensure that work practices are sufficiently flexible to ensure that this component of the Programme is delivered in a cost-effective manner. It should ensure, in particular, that the full potential of existing and emerging technology is exploited in order to minimise the need for on-farm interventions.

Recommendation 17 (Chapter 8)

Overlap in the responsibility for the collection of disease levies/inspection fees between different Divisions in the Department should be removed by the transfer of responsibility for the collection of the disease levies to the Central Fees Unit and Dairying Division.

9.4 Programme effectiveness

Programme effectiveness can be thought of as having two components - substantive and evaluative. Analysis of substantive effectiveness requires consideration of whether the programme, over the period under examination, has (i) achieved its objectives; and (ii) achieved them in a cost-effective manner. The first of these questions is addressed in Chapter 6 of this report, while the second is dealt with in Chapters 6 and 8, the latter examining how cost-effectiveness might be improved by the adoption of novel policy or organisational approaches.

Analysis of the second component of effectiveness – evaluative effectiveness – requires consideration of the programme’s ability to measure and improve on the Programme’s substantive effectiveness, through the use of performance indicators. This is dealt with in Chapter 7 of the report.

9.4.1 Conclusions (substantive effectiveness)

- In the period under review, the BTEP has met its interim objective of controlling bovine tuberculosis at levels consistent with maintaining trade in bovine animals and their products. Considerable progress has been made in overcoming the constraints to eradication through investment in research and technology; however, the existence of an infected wildlife reservoir remains a continuing and substantial obstacle to the eventual eradication of bovine TB.

- Although the On-Farm Market Valuation Scheme (OFMVS) is somewhat more expensive to operate than its predecessor – the Reactor Grant Scheme (RGS) – it is more equitable and effective than the latter as it better reflects market value and reduces distortions in the market for reactor cattle.

- The Depopulation, Income Supplement and Hardship Grant schemes, which are unique to Ireland among the countries examined in the preparation of this review, serve a very useful function in alleviating the income losses incurred by herdowners as a result of a disease breakdown. However, there would appear to be a need to review the rates of grant, in particular, to better target those categories of animals that give rise to the biggest income loss.
- The rates of grant available under the Income Supplement Scheme do not reflect the seasonal variation in the income loss arising from the removal of reactors or the different income loss associated with the different categories of animal removed.
- The rates currently payable under the Hardship Grant may not adequately reflect the variations both in the cost of feeding cattle over the November-April period or the increase in value of the various categories of animals over the same period.
- Those tuberculin tests that are carried out over and above the requirements of the Trade Directive are cost-effective and should be retained, as should those measures aimed at improving the targeting of testing carried out under the Programme.
- The IFN- γ assay is believed to contribute to the cost-effective resolution of TB breakdowns, in conjunction with the intradermal test, in certain circumstances. However, the lower specificity and the higher unit cost of the assay when compared to the SICTT result in some additional costs. Quantification of certain of the benefits associated with the use of the assay would assist the ongoing refinement of the protocols governing its deployment.
- The significant role played by infective badgers in maintaining bovine tuberculosis in Ireland justifies both the level of investment in the development of a badger vaccine and the operation of a targeted interim wildlife strategy.

- While the significant reduction in the incidence of TB since 1998 may be attributed to a number of factors, the introduction, in 2002, of the interim wildlife strategy, can reasonably be regarded as having made an important contribution to this improving situation.
- Through its positive impact on trade in bovine animals and their products, on the productivity of bovine animals and on the protection of human health, the Programme confers benefits on farmers, processors and on society at large.
- Opportunities exist to further enhance the containment of disease in high-risk herds by the adoption of certain additional programme measures and by the dissemination of best practice in relation to such herds.

9.4.2 Conclusions (evaluative effectiveness)

- The Programme has a strong history of collating performance data, particularly in relation to disease control.
- While the wide range of indicators already in existence provides valuable information on programme performance, the adoption of a limited number of additional indicators would complement those already in place to provide a comprehensive and accurate account of Programme performance.

9.4.3 Recommendations (substantive effectiveness)

Recommendation 7 (Chapter 6)

The rates of grant available under the Income Supplement Scheme should be reviewed to better reflect the seasonal variation in the income loss arising from the removal of reactors and the different levels of income loss for the different categories of cattle. The continuing eligibility of herdowners for this scheme should be reviewed after a period of 6 months on the basis of a comparison between herd composition and enterprise type at that time and the position prior to the breakdown.

Recommendation 8 (Chapter 6)

The rates of grant payable under the Hardship Grant Scheme should be reviewed, in particular, to better target the grants on those cattle where the cost of feed significantly exceeds the increase in value during the November-April period. The scheme should also be restricted to herdowners who can demonstrate that they have additional cattle and feed requirements in their herds as a result of the restriction imposed for disease control purposes.

Recommendation 9 (Chapter 6)

Research and technological development remain crucial to the resolution of the factors that continue to constrain progress towards the eradication of bovine TB and the Department should, consequently, maintain its support for these measures.

Recommendation 10 (Chapter 6)

The Department should reassess its policy in relation to the deployment of IFN- γ assay in light of the results of a study, currently being undertaken, on the effectiveness of the test in shortening restriction periods.

Recommendation 12 (Chapter 8)

Having regard to recent research findings, the Department should consider implementing one of the policy options outlined in this report aimed at enhancing disease control measures in respect of high-risk herds.

Recommendation 13 (Chapter 8)

The Department should consider implementing improved protocols for the management of herds contiguous to infective breakdowns.

9.4.4 Recommendations (evaluative effectiveness)

Recommendation 11 (Chapter 7)

The Department should expand its existing range of Performance Indicators, by selectively adopting some of those additional indicators identified in this chapter. It should clearly identify those measures that are regarded as being the Key Performance Indicators for the Bovine TB Eradication Programme and these should be regularly published on the Department's website.

9.5 Continuing relevance

9.6.1 Conclusions

- The maintenance of a Programme for the Eradication of Bovine TB continues to be relevant to Ireland because, in conjunction with certain other animal health measures, it provides the guarantees necessary to enable Irish cattle and their products to access the EU and third country markets.

9.6 Summary of recommendations

Rationale

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