

Katy Wilkinson

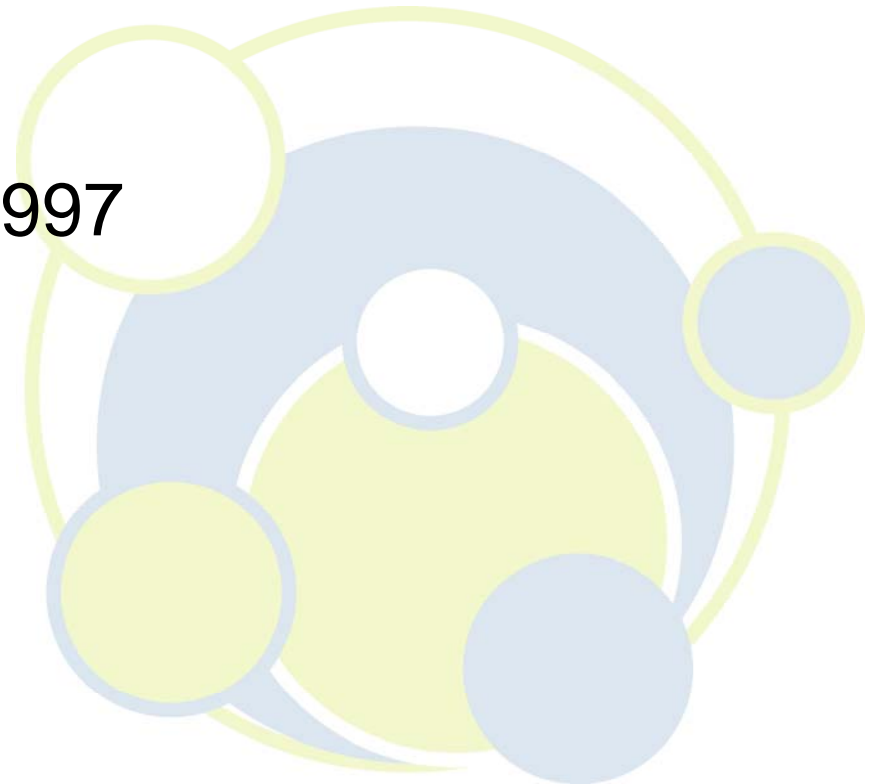
Too much evidence, too little policy?
Competing knowledge claims and
Bovine TB control

Warwick HRI
May 2010



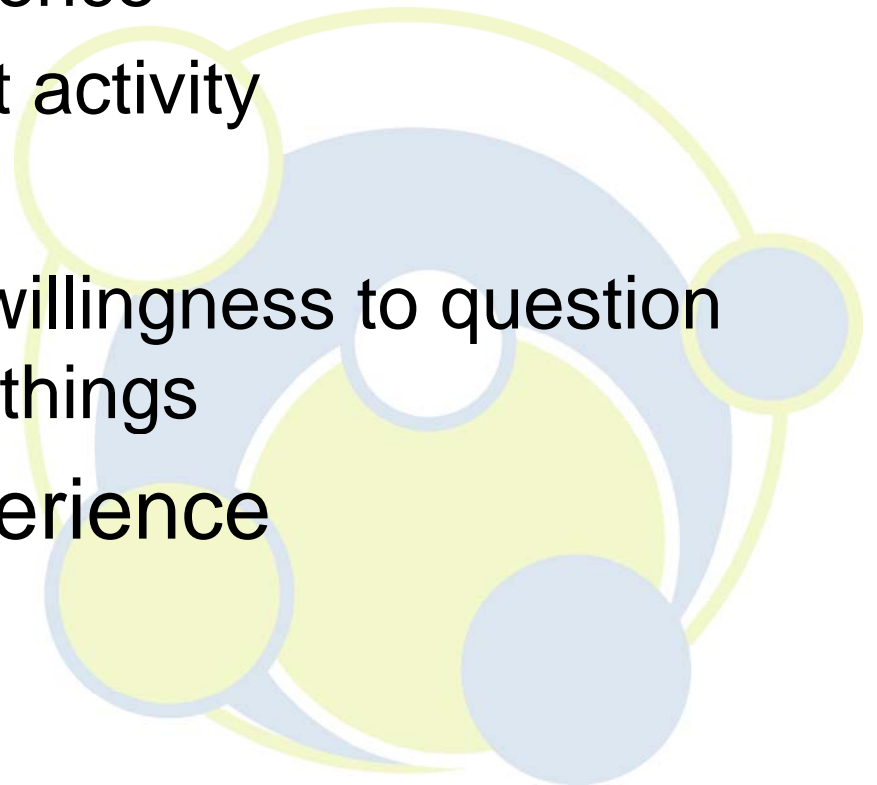
Introduction

- Decade after Modernising Government
- TB as a case study of EBPM
- Structure of the paper
 - Theory of EBPM
 - Bovine TB story since 1997
 - EBPM reconsidered



Evidence-Based Policy-Making

- Modernising Government white paper
- Central tenets:
 - Policies shaped by evidence
 - Measured by results not activity
 - Flexible and innovative
 - More new ideas, more willingness to question inherited ways of doing things
- Influenced by BSE experience



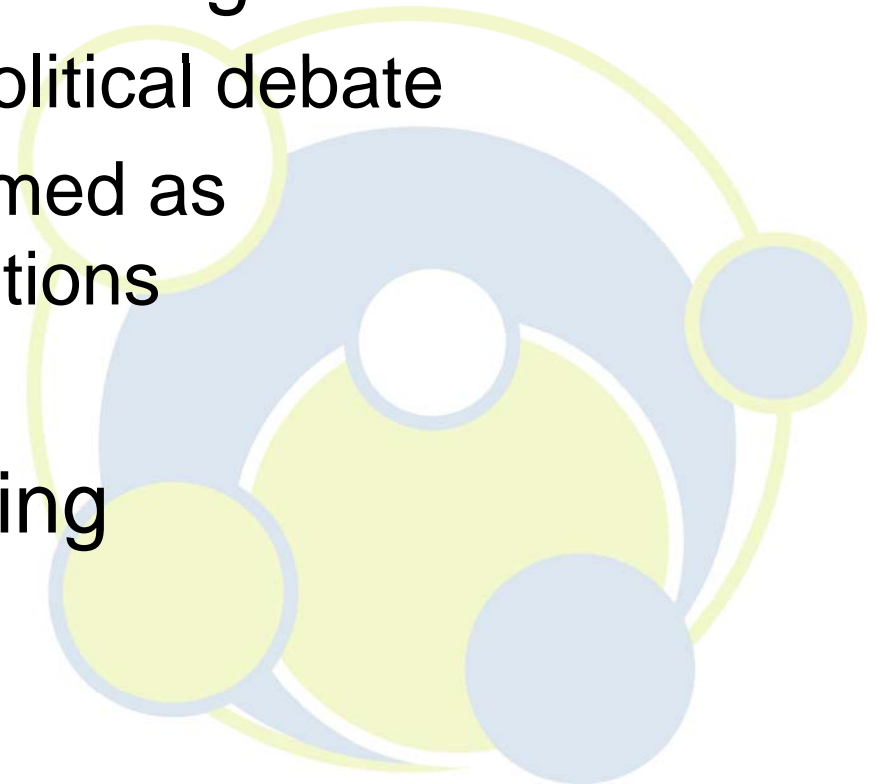
Defra's Use of Science

- 2800 scientists and vets in Defra
- 7000 more in Defra's agencies and NDPBs
- Raft of policy documents
 - Delivering the Evidence (2003)
 - Evidence and Innovation Strategy (2004)
 - Development and Use of Scientific Advice (2004)
 - Science Meets Policy (2005)
 - Etc



Benefits of EBPM

- Basis in evidence-based medicine:
“diagnosis” of problems
- Depoliticises decision-making
 - Policy placed beyond political debate
 - Political decisions reframed as technical/scientific questions
 - Blame shifting
- Certainty in policy-making



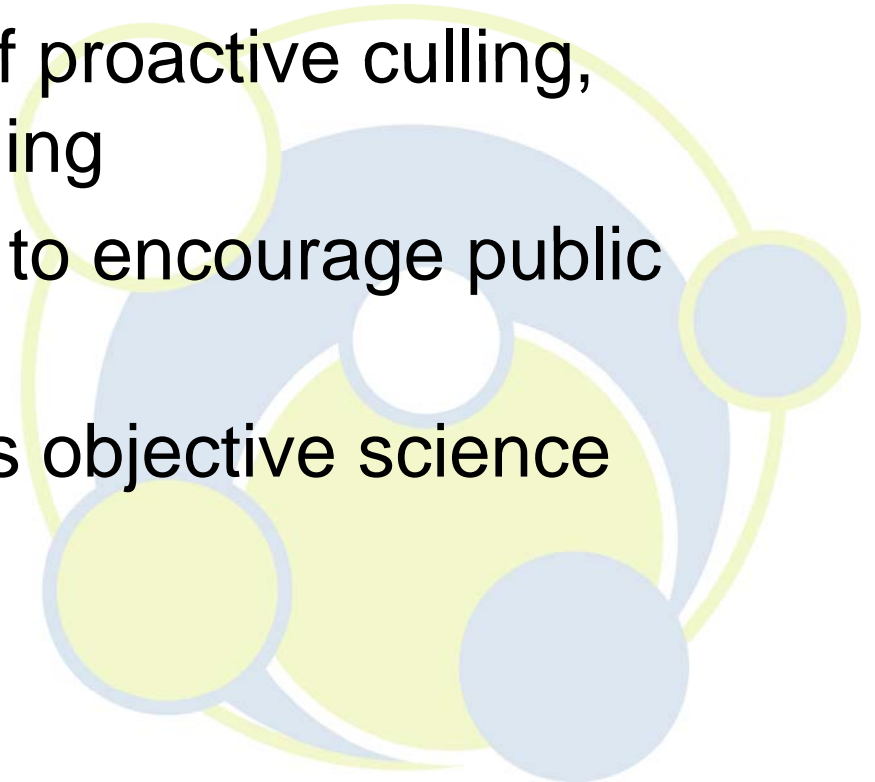
BTB prior to 1997

- Growing incidence of disease + increasing government spending = pressure to do something
- Highly contested link between badgers and TB
- No rigorous scientific proof
- Commissioning of Sir John Krebs report



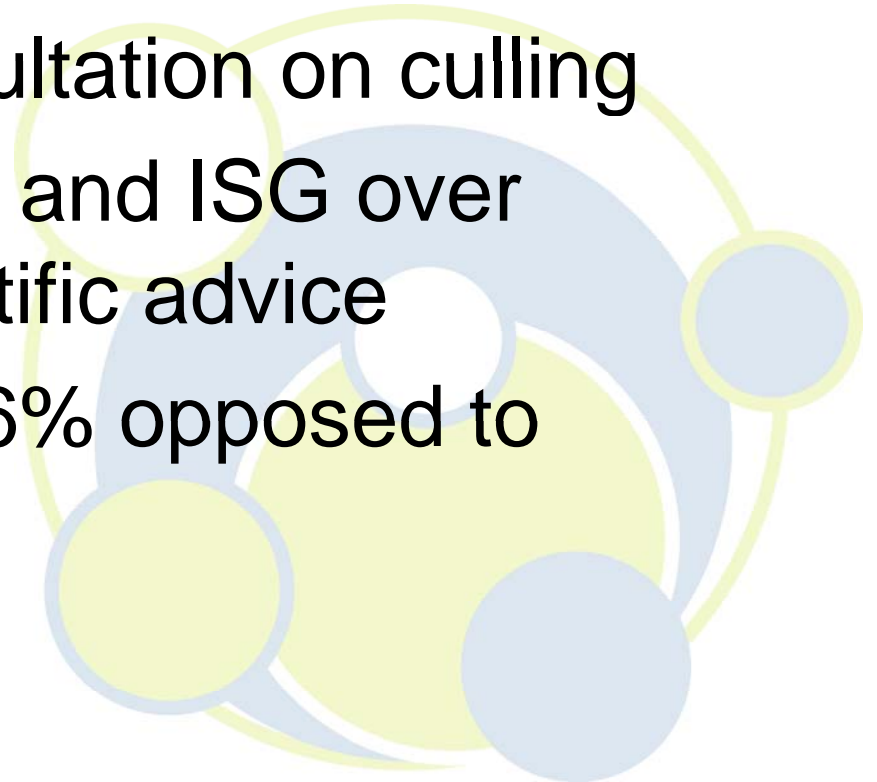
Krebs and the RBCT

- Recommended systematic scientific experiment
- Randomised Badger Culling Trials (RBCT)
- Independent Scientific Group (ISG)
- Compared effectiveness of proactive culling, reactive culling and no culling
- Some modifications made to encourage public support
- Nevertheless, portrayed as objective science



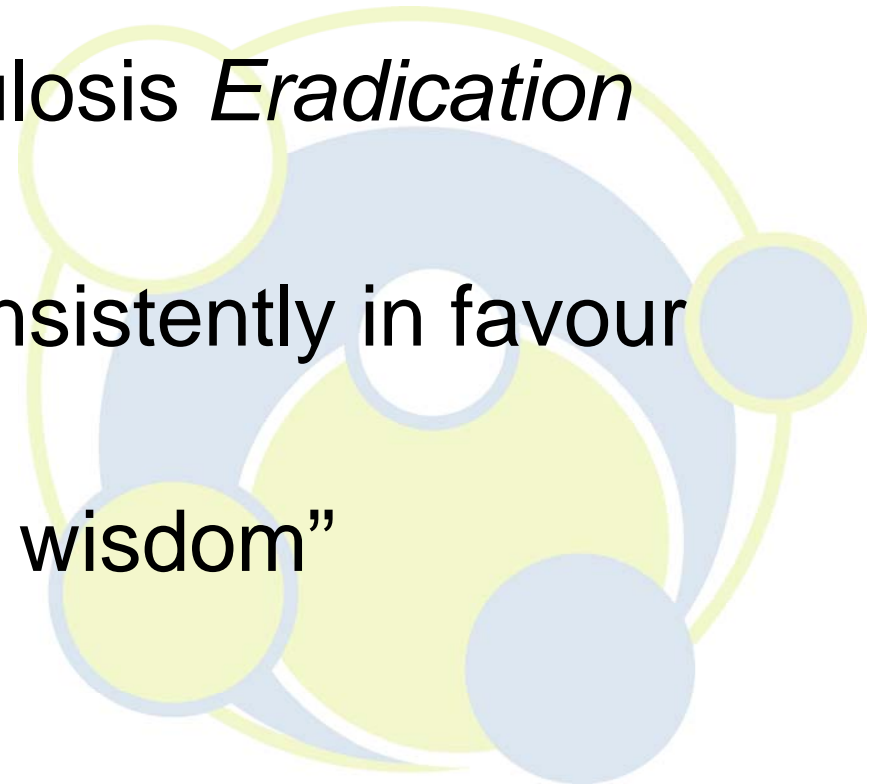
Public consultation dispute

- Initial conclusions of the RBCT: perturbation effect means culling can increase TB spread
- Defra announces consultation on culling
- Dispute between Defra and ISG over representation of scientific advice
- 47,000 responses, 95.6% opposed to badger culling



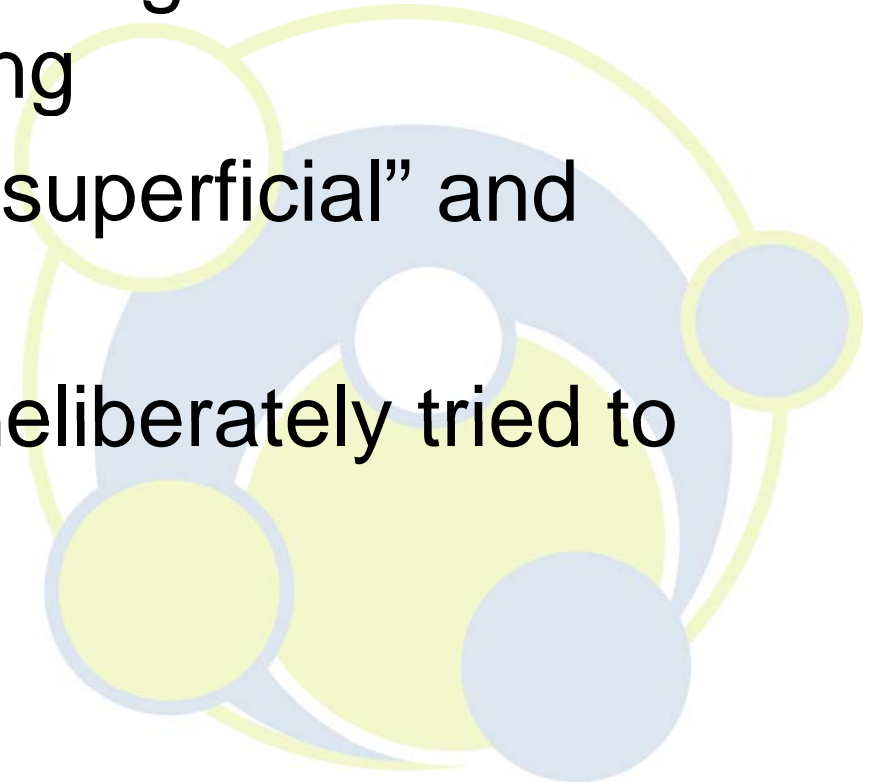
Veterinary expertise

- Final ISG report confirms initial findings
- Creation of Tuberculosis Advisory Group (TBAG), veterinarian-led
- Succeeded by Tuberculosis *Eradiation* Group (TBEG)
- Vets (through BVA) consistently in favour of culling
- Emphasis on “practical wisdom”



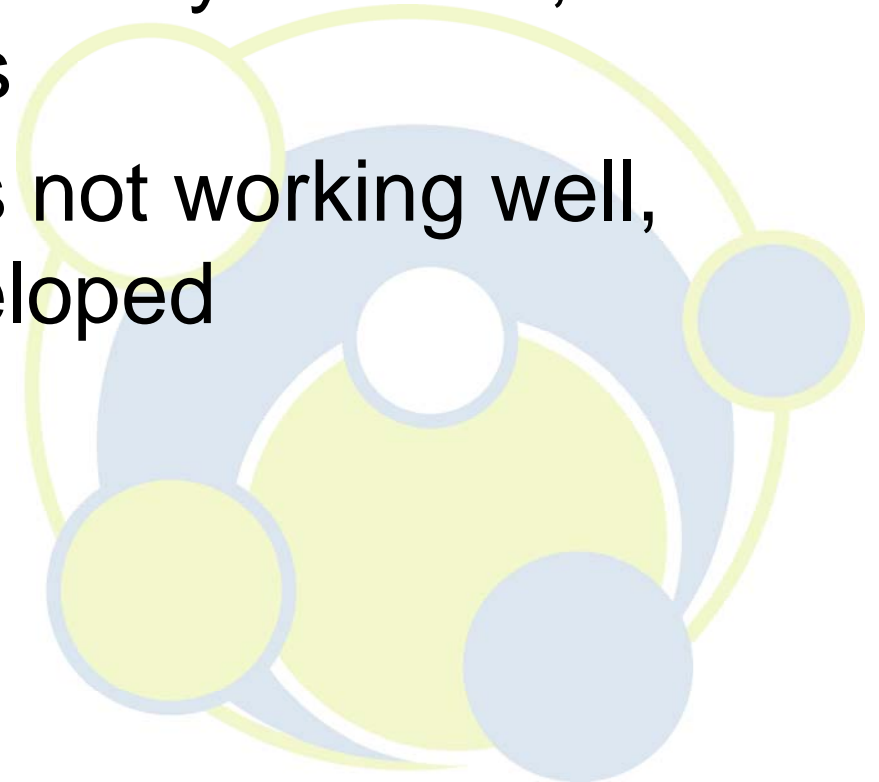
Challenging the ISG

- Asked to report on ISG science; published in same week as ISG final report
- King questioned ISG findings and advocated badger culling
- ISG criticised King for “superficial” and “very selective” report
- Implication that Defra deliberately tried to undermine ISG



Why more evidence?

- ISG scientific evidence has, to an extent, silenced critics (especially NFU)
- However, doesn't lead to any obvious, workable policy options
- Cattle based measures not working well, vaccine still being developed



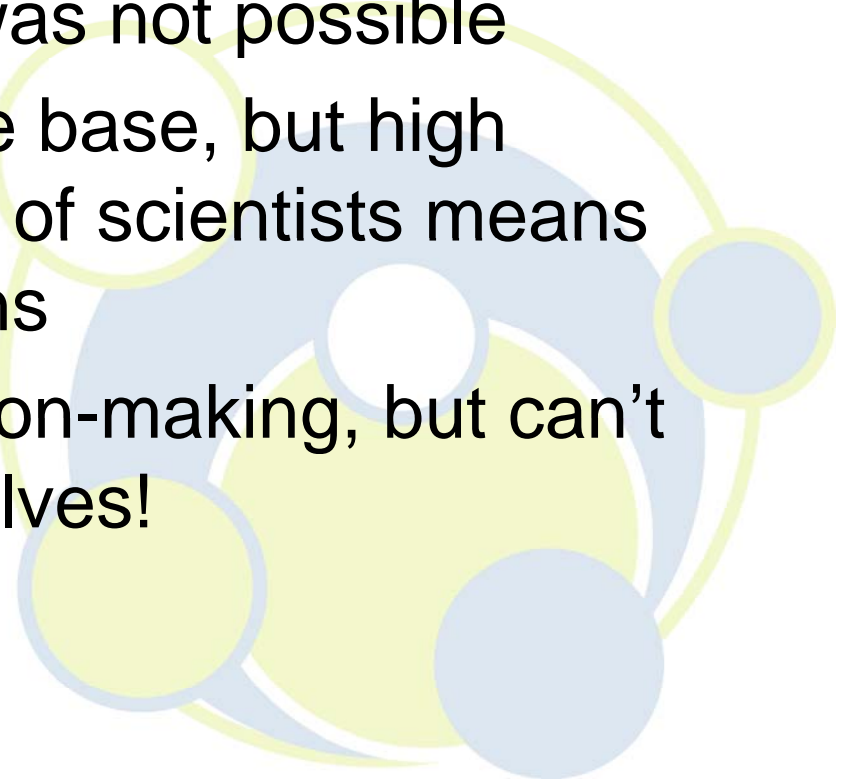
Depoliticisation, Repoliticisation

- Depoliticisation not possible in the case of BTB
- Increasingly fragmented and contested evidence base gives power to Defra's critics, but no firm justification for policy
- 'Repoliticisation' is necessary: taking a difficult decision that possibly ignores the evidence
- Welsh example increases demands for action



Conclusion

- Following decades of inaction, the RBCT seemed to offer the magic bullet Defra wanted
- But lack of obvious policy options meant that hoped-for depoliticisation was not possible
- Re-opening of the evidence base, but high public spending and profile of scientists means scrutiny of ministers remains
- Evidence can inform decision-making, but can't eliminate decisions themselves!



References

- M Flinders and J Buller (2006) 'Depoliticisation: Principles, tactics and tools' British Politics 1.3
- S Hinchliffe (2001) 'Indeterminacy in-decisions – science, policy and politics in the BSE crisis' Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 26.2
- G Majone (1989) Evidence, Argument and Persuasion in the Policy Process. Yale University Press.

