

Ref. MMF/DMB

Tim Davie CBE
Director General, BBC
Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London W1A 1AA

16 August 2024

Dear Mr Davie,

I am writing to you ahead of the forthcoming broadcast of the BBC programme *The Badgers, the Farmers and Me*, presented by Brian May, due on BBC Two at 9pm on Friday 23 August.

As Chief Executive of one of the UK's largest rural campaigning organisations, I appreciate that the BBC exists to provide a platform for a diverse range of contestable viewpoints. In expressing concern about this programme, I have no wish to debate the badger cull or bovine TB. Rather, what I cannot understand is how the BBC can justify its decision to commission a current affairs programme on so sensitive an issue, presented by someone with clearly partisan views.

That Brian May is a partisan on this subject cannot reasonably be contested. His own website catalogues his history as an activist in opposition to badger culling dating back to 2010, when he describes his earliest surviving post as "more current Badger talk"; in 2013 his posting on the matter was so prolific as to suggest obsession. His record in the broader sphere of 'animal rights' activism includes party political campaigning against his perceived opponents and, in a 2015 interview on BBC Newsnight, forcing presenter Laura Kuenssberg to apologise to viewers after he described people who disagree with his opposition to wildlife management as "all lying bastards".

Were Sir Brian merely being interviewed as part of a broader consideration of badger culling in the context of bovine TB, with due weight given to authentic rural voices presenting alternative viewpoints, there would be no grounds for complaint. Rather, he appears to have been commissioned for this programme precisely because of his partisan activism and the profile he has built for himself surrounding it. The decision to do so is fundamentally incompatible with the BBC's obligation to be impartial.

T 020 7840 9200
E info@countryside-alliance.org
W www.countryside-alliance.org

China Works
Black Prince Road
London SE1 7SJ

The BBC's own editorial guidelines state in terms:

"Our audiences should not be able to tell from BBC output the personal opinions of our journalists or news and current affairs presenters on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on 'controversial subjects' in any other area."

Bovine TB and the public policy response of badger culling is both a current affair and a matter of live public controversy. These guidelines as well as the BBC's overarching duty as a public broadcaster to ensure balance and fairness in its programming, especially when approaching controversial current affairs, make the commissioning decision in this instance incomprehensible.

Aside from the crippling financial strain, Bovine TB outbreaks impose a considerable toll on the mental health of farmers. The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution has described taking calls from farming victims of bovine TB who had experienced such crippling impacts as to drive them to contemplate suicide. They deserve our compassion and our support. They are ill-served by a public broadcaster that is treating them with such disregard.

Tim Bonner

Chief Executive

Email: tim-bonner@countryside-alliance.org

T 020 7840 9200
E info@countryside-alliance.org
W www.countryside-alliance.org

China Works
Black Prince Road
London SE1 7SJ