

Dr Craig Shuttleworth
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Carolyn Thomas MS Chair
Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Your ref P-06-1332

11th March 2025

Dear Carolyn,

Petition P-06-1332 'Fund vaccine research to protect red squirrels from deadly Squirrelpox virus'

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs letter (HIDCC/00213/25) to the Petitions Committee dated 10 March 2025.

It is to the credit of the Minister and the Welsh Government that they alone amongst the four UK administrations have had the courage to look seriously at this issue.

I would though like to raise some points for your consideration.

As you know, 11,300 people signed my petition from its launch in January 2023. The Senedd then debated the petition on 27th September of 2023. And almost eight months later the Cabinet Secretary announced on 20th May 2024 [that they had],

'... agreed to the recommendation to carry out a feasibility study to assess the prospect of the research, manufacture, marketing authorisation, and deployment of a squirrelpox vaccine for red squirrels, and associated risks, benefits and costs. The Cabinet Secretary also agreed to outsource the feasibility study to an external provider.'

The additional nine months delay since suggests departmental officials are perhaps not fully aware of the growing urgency regarding the epidemic. Meanwhile squirrelpox is spreading north in Scotland and has obliterated key populations in northern England so that many at on the conservation front line are suggesting extinction without a vaccine.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/16/red-squirrels-to-vanish-from-england-unless-vaccine-against-squirrelpox-funded>

I'd ask the Petitions Committee to consider writing to the Deputy First Minister asking:

- (1) For much more detail regarding what is currently and vaguely described as a 'shortly' timeline.
- (2) To clarify whether the tendering process will be open to any party to express an interest or if it will be invitation only in which case how are invitees being selected?
- (3) To explain why, as is my understanding, to date no officials have contacted the Wildlife Ark Trust which own the intellectual rights to the earlier attenuated pox vaccine research 2012/13.

Kind regards

Craig

Dr Craig Shuttleworth
Petitioner P-06-1332

<https://www.bangor.ac.uk/staff/sens/craig-shuttleworth-082156/en>