

Opinion of the
Scientific Steering Committee
on the
GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF
BOVINE SPONGIFORM
ENCEPHALOPATHY (GBR) in
The Principality of ANDORRA

Adopted by the SSC on 6 December 2002

**Opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee on the
GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY
(GBR)
in Andorra –2002**

THE QUESTION

The Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) was asked by the Commission to provide an up-to-date scientific opinion on the Geographical BSE risk (GBR), i.e. the likelihood of the presence of one or more cattle being infected with BSE, pre-clinically as well as clinically, in countries that have formally requested the determination of their BSE status in accordance with Article 5 of the Regulation (EC) No 999/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

This opinion addresses the GBR of Andorra as assessed in November 2002.

THE ANSWER

It should be noted that the very small cattle/BSE system of Andorra is most appropriately regarded to be a sub-system to the French or Spanish BSE/cattle system, which is known to have been incorporating and recycling the BSE-agent.

In view of the very small cattle population in Andorra and of the level of BSE-prevalence registered in France, Spain and most other European countries, it may take several years before a single BSE case is identified in Andorra, even with a very efficient surveillance system.

It is therefore concluded that it is likely but not confirmed (**GBR III**) that domestic cattle are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent

The SSC is concerned that the available information was not confirmed by inspection missions as they are performed by the FVO in the Member States. It recommends that BSE-related aspects are included in the program of future inspection missions, as far as feasible.

THE BACKGROUND

In July 2000 the SSC adopted its final opinion on "the Geographical Risk of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (GBR)". It described a method and a process for the assessment of the GBR and summarised the outcome of its application to 23 countries. Detailed reports on the GBR-assessments were published on the Internet for each of these countries.

On 1 July 2001 Regulation (EC) No 999/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council entered into force. This regulation lays down rules for the prevention, control and eradication of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in animals (TSE Regulation). Appropriate risk management measures are defined in relation to the BSE Status category. In Annex II of this Regulation the method for the determination of the BSE status is described. It requires two steps, namely a risk assessment and the evaluation of specific criteria listed in annex II, chapter A, point (b) to (e). The Commission regards the GBR as provided by the SSC as an adequate Risk Assessment as required by the regulation. However, countries may also provide their own risk assessment in which case the SSC will be requested to provide a scientific opinion on the validity of that risk assessment as well as of its result.

In January 2002 the SSC updated its opinion on the GBR and determined that exports from all countries classified as GBR III or IV pose a certain risk of carrying the BSE-agent, independent if they have or have not confirmed at least one domestic BSE case. The SSC also provided an estimate of the level of risk emitted from these "BSE risk countries" in relation to the time of export.

Andorra has formally requested the determination of its BSE status in accordance with Article 5 of the TSE Regulation and subsequently the Commission asked the Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) to provide a scientific opinion on the Geographical BSE risk of Andorra.

THE RISK ASSESSMENT

For Andorra the SSC concluded that it was “**likely but not confirmed**” that domestic cattle in Andorra are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent (**GBR III**)

THE ANALYSIS

EXTERNAL CHALLENGE

Andorra was exposed to a significant **external challenge** from 1980 -2000 and a negligible **external challenge** from 2001 onwards. This external challenge resulted from MBM imports. In total the country imported over the period 1980-2001 a total of 99 tons of MBM from France. No MBM was imported from the UK. According to the CD approximately 3.5 tons of MBM were imported from Spain in the 1990s. It is further assumed that the feed imports (about 15,000 tons for the whole period) also represent a significant source for MBM reaching cattle in Andorra based on the fact that cross-contamination of ruminant feed was common in Spain. Although a high number of cattle were imported from BSE risk countries (France and Spain) (57,665) but since no cattle can be rendered in Andorra, this implies that, if the BSE-agent was present in the imported cattle, it could not have entered the feed chain and reach the domestic cattle. Therefore, the imported animals do not represent any challenge to Andorra’s domestic cattle. Taking into account the available information on the origin and use made of the imported cattle and MBM it is concluded that it cannot be excluded that the BSE agent reached domestic cattle already in the early 80s.

STABILITY

On the basis of the available information it was concluded that the country’s BSE/cattle system was extremely unstable between 1980-1998, very unstable between 1999-2000 and optimally stable as from 2001 onwards.

Feeding

Feeding MBM to cattle was legally possible until December 2000. Theoretically the feedstuffs from Spain should have been void of mammalian MBM since 1994 but this condition was only ensured since the second half of 2001. It is hence assumed that feeding was “**not OK**” until 1998. Since 1999, when the situation in Spain improved and the rules for the specific beef label were introduced, it was “**reasonably OK**”, and since 2001, following the control of the “total feed ban” it is considered “**OK**”.

Rendering

As no rendering plant operates Andorra the BSE agent could not enter the feed chain. However, all feed is imported from mainly Spain, and it can not be excluded that the BSE-agent reached the cattle population via cross-contamination of ruminant feed with MBM, therefore “**not OK**” until 2000. Since the feed ban was in place it follows the situation in Spain and France, therefore “**OK**” as from 2001.

SRM-removal

SRM was not removed in Andorra before 1999 since there was no slaughterhouse. Up to then all animal waste has been incinerated. At the start of operation of the slaughterhouse SRM was not removed. As all feed is imported from Spain, the Spanish situation as regards SRM-removal has to be taken into account as well. Therefore, SRM-removal is considered “**not OK**” until the end of 2000. Because Andorra decided to follow the EU regulation on SRM removal and the situation in Spain improved as well, it is considered “**OK**” since 2001.

BSE surveillance

BSE is notifiable since June 2000. Active BSE surveillance, including testing of fallen stock only started in the middle of 2001. Before the surveillance system would not have been able to detect a low BSE incidence.

CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR

The very small cattle/BSE system of Andorra is most appropriately regarded to be a sub-system to the French or Spanish BSE/cattle system, which is known to have been incorporating and recycling the BSE-agent. Andorra imported the same risk as it existed in the exporting countries, mainly Spain, from where feed was imported. The feeding system is of utmost importance in this context. If it could be excluded that imported, potentially contaminated feed stuffs reached cattle, such imports might not lead to an internal challenge at all.

EXPECTED DEVELOPMENT OF THE GBR

In view of the very small cattle population in Andorra and of the level of BSE-prevalence registered in France, Spain and most other European countries, it may take several years before a single BSE case is identified in Andorra, even with a very efficient surveillance system.

A table summarising the reasons for the current assessment is given in annex 1 to this opinion. A detailed report on the assessment of the GBR of Andorra as produced by the GBR-Peer Group is published separately on the Internet. The country had opportunities to comment on different drafts of the report before the SSC took both, the report and the comments, into account for producing this opinion. The SSC appreciates the good co-operation of the country's authorities.

Principality of ANDORRA– Summary of the GBR-Assessment, December 2002						
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY			INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-2000: Significant 2001: Negligible		1980-1998: Extremely unstable 1999-2000: Very unstable 2001: Optimally stable			For Andorra, recycling, if at all, will have happened within the Spanish and French BSE/cattle systems where cattle from Andorra were exclusively slaughtered until 1999. Andorra therefore imported the same risk as it existed in the exporting countries, mainly Spain, from where feed was imported.
GBR-Level	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	
III	UK: No cattle were imported from UK Other BSE risk countries:	UK: No MBM imports Other BSE risk countries:	Not OK until 1998. Reasonably OK as from 1999 (specific beef label).	Not OK until 2000 (No rendering in Andorra but feed imported from Spain and France)	Not OK until 2000 and OK since 2001	BSE is listed as notifiable disease since June 2000. Active surveillance system in place since February 2001 (healthy slaughtered cattle >30 months) and since November 2001 (fallen stock > 24 months)
decreasing	Other BSE risk countries: according to the country import data, 3,225 live cattle and according to Eurostat and other data, 57,665	According to country import data: 80-85: 0 t 86-90: 0 t 91-95: 1.54 t 96-2000: 2 t Total: 3.54 t According to Eurostat and other data: 80-85: 74 t 86-90: 25 t 91-95: 0 t 96-2000: 0 t Total: 99 t In total about 15,000 tons of feed imported mainly from Spain.	OK since 2001 (control of total feed ban).	OK since 2001		INTERNAL CHALLENGE An internal challenge might have occurred in Andorra as soon as it occurred in France (1980) or in Spain (1985). The existence of infected domestic cattle in Andorra depends on the risk that cattle were exposed to potentially contaminated imported feed. It is also possible that cattle, imported from BSE risk countries (mainly Spain and France) and still alive in Andorra could currently be incubating the BSE agent.