Opinion of the

Scientific Steering Committee

on the

GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (GBR) in

Austria

Update adopted on 16/5/2002

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

THE QUESTION

The Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) was asked by the Commission to update its 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 an updated GBR of Austria as assessed in May 2002.

THE ANSWER

The BSE-agent was most likely imported into the country and could have reached domestic cattle via cross-contamination in feed mills, during transport or on farm. It is therefore concluded that it is likely that one or several cattle that are (pre-clinically or clinically) infected with the BSE agent are currently present in the domestic cattle population of Austria **(GBR-III)**. This is confirmed by the domestic case identified in November 2001.

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 2001Regulation (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.

Austria has formally requested the determination of its BSE status in accordance with Article 5 of the TSE Regulation and subsequently the Commission requested the Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) to provide an up-to-date scientific opinion on the Geographical BSE-Risk of Austria.

THE RISK ASSESSMENT

For Austria the SSC already expressed an opinion on its GBR in July 2000, concluding that it was "unlikely but not excluded" that in Austria could be present one or more cattle being infected with BSE, pre-clinically as well as clinically.

In the meantime Austria has, as all Member States of the EU, implemented a large-scale active sampling programme. As Austria has found one domestic BSE case it fulfils the conditions for GBR III "presence of one or more cattle clinically or pre-clinically infected with the BSE agent in a geographical region/country is confirmed, at a lower level".

In addition to the improvement with regard to BSE surveillance Austria has, as all Member States of the European Union, implemented an SRM-ban (October 2000) and a "total feed ban" prohibiting feeding of MBM to any animal farmed for food as laid down in EU legislation (1/1/2001).

In January 2002 the SSC updated its opinion on the GBR. It concluded that exports from all countries assessed as GBR III (and IV) would pose a risk, also if no domestic cases were notified so far.

These developments, together with the fact that Austria has imported significant amounts of live cattle and MBM from countries now understood as representing a BSE risk that were not taken into account in 2000, made an update of the former GBR assessment of Austria necessary.

THE ANALYSIS

THE EXTERNAL CHALLENGE

Austria was exposed to a **very high external challenge** from 1980-2000 due to import of large numbers of live cattle (about 190.000) and large amounts of MBM (45,000 tons according to the country or 95,000 tons according to Eurostat and other export statistics) from BSE-risk countries. While significant fractions of these imports most likely did not enter the Austrian BSE/cattle system it is however very likely that the BSE agent was imported into the country.

Taken account of the information available on the origin and use made of the imported cattle and MBM it is concluded that in the early eighties the external challenge from cattle imports was low. It was high for 1986 to 1995 and very high for the period 1996-2000. On the other hand MBM imports were posing a very high external challenge throughout the period 1980 to 2000.

STABILITY

On the basis of the available information it has to be concluded that the country's BSE/cattle system was **unstable** until **1996**, i.e. it would have recycled and amplified BSE infectivity. It was then **neutrally stable** from **1997 to 2000** and since **2001** it is **optimally stable** due to the combined introduction of a "total feed ban", an SRM ban, the incineration of domestic MBM, and sufficient measures against cross-contamination (since 3/2001).

Feeding

Including MBM into cattle feed was not allowed since 1954 (feed standards) and since 1990 the use of MM, MBM, animal meal, blood meal, bone meal etc. for feeding ruminants is prohibited. As feeding mammalian MBM to non-ruminants was allowed until end 2000, and feedmills produced feed for ruminants and non-ruminants in the same lines, cross-contamination of cattle feed with animal protein is likely to have occurred. Feed controls have been implemented since 1990 but data on controls and findings are only available since 1997, indicating that cross-contamination still appeared until 2001, when the situation significantly improved. Feeding is therefore regarded "**reasonably OK**" since 1980 and **"OK"** since 2001.

Rendering

Before 1996 rendering was already "**reasonably OK**". From 1996, when the system was further improved, rendering is regarded "**OK**".

SRM-removal

Before October 2000, there was no SRM ban. Therefore SRM removal was "**not OK**" up to 1/10/2000. Since October 2000, with the ban in place, the situation improved. In addition the likelihood that SRM are rendered and the produced MBM reaches Austrian cattle is regarded to be low enough to judge SRM-removal from the feed chain as being "**OK**".

BSE surveillance

Passive BSE surveillance is in place since the late 80s but only since 1999-2000 the number of cattle brains annually checked for BSE is above the OIE-requirements as established in 1997. Only two BSE suspects were notified in 2001, which indicates a limited ability to detect cases by this approach. The targeted active surveillance that started in 2001 has substantially improved the ability to find BSE-infected animals, as demonstrated by the first case found in December 2001.

CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR

The BSE-agent was most likely imported into the country and could have reached domestic cattle via cross-contamination in feed mills, during transport or on farm. It is therefore concluded that it is likely that one or several cattle that are (pre-clinically or clinically) infected with the BSE agent are currently present in the domestic cattle population of Austria **(GBR-III)**. This is confirmed by the domestic case identified in November 2001.

THE EXPECTED DEVELOPMENT OF THE GBR

In view of the above-summarised assessment it is expected that the final incidence, as established by the continuing extensive active surveillance, will remain low. Given the fact that the system is **optimally stable** since January 2001, the likelihood of the presence of BSE-infected cattle is expected to decrease with the rate by which cattle born before 1/3/2001 leave the system.

A summary of the reasons for the current assessment is given in annex 1 to this opinion.

A detailed report on the updated assessment of the GBR of Austria as produced by the GBR-Peer Group is published separately on the Internet. The country had two 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.

AUSTRIA – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, May 2002							
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		**STABILITY**				**INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY**
	1980-at current: Very high		**1980-1996: Unstable; 1997-2000: Neutrally Stable; 2001: Optimally stable**				It cannot be excluded that the BSE agent reached domestic cattle via imported MBM and domestic MBM initially made from cattle imported from BSE risk countries. Theoretically this could already have happened in the early 80s. The continuous imports increased the risk that domestic cattle had access to contaminated feed, mainly due to cross contamination. Since 1997 amplification of the agent became unlikely because rendering was improved and since 2001 the risk of new infection is very small. In view of the optimally stable system, the GBR will decrease rapidly, following the rate at which cattle born before 2001 leave the system.
GBR-Level	***Live Cattle imports***	***MBM imports***	***Feeding***	***Rendering***	***SRM-removal***	***BSE surveillance***	
III **GBR-trend** **Rapidly decreasing GBR**	<u>UK</u>: 248 according to country and 120 according to EUROSTAT. <u>Other BSE risk countries</u>: 192261 according to the country. According to EUROSTAT, 137792 from BE, DK, FR, DE, IT, LUX, NL, SP. Other BSE-risk countries from where AT imported were: CZR, HY, PO, SK, SL, and CH.	<u>UK</u>: no imports <u>Other BSE risk countries</u>: According to the country: 80-85: 18,165 t 86-90: 16,775 t 91-95: 7,377 t 96-2000: 2,681 t Total: 44.998 t According to Eurostat and third country export data: 80-85: 40,783 t 86-90: 31,412 t 91-95: 13,399 t 96-2000: 9,670 t Total: 95269 t	**Reasonably OK before 2001, OK there after** ▪ Feed legislation prohibited inclusion of MBM n cattle feed since 1954 but insufficient controls were in place. ▪ Feed ban since 28/11/1990. ▪ Feeding of MBM possible due to cross-contamination. ▪ Documented feed controls since 1997. ▪ Cross-contamination found until February 2001, since then no further breaches of the 2001 total feed ban.	**Reasonably OK before 1996, OK thereafter.** Rendering industry exclusively operates 133°C/20^{min}/3 ^{bar}, Evidence of improved controls since 1996.	**Not OK until 10/2000. OK thereafter** SRM was normally rendered, also if from condemned material/animals or from fallen stock. SRM ban since 10/200 (rendered but MBM is incinerated).	BSE is compulsory notifiable since 1991. Compensation is paid for suspects and other animals culled. Number of BSE suspects always very low and number of cattle brains annually examined for BSE too low until 1988. Since 2001 active surveillance that identified a first case on 6/12/2001.	**INTERNAL CHALLENGE** Internal challenge possibly occurred in the early 80s, probably due to exposure to imported MBM via cross contamination. As recycling was possible it is likely that an internal challenge, if existing, increased. However, Austria's BSE/cattle system was never "very unstable" and the increase of the internal challenge is therefore unlikely to have been steep.