

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

Adopted on 29/06/2001

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THE QUESTION

The Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) was asked by the Commission to express 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, at a given point in time, in a number of Third Countries.

This opinion addresses the GBR of Panama.

THE BACKGROUND

In December 1997 the SSC expressed its first opinion on Specified Risk Materials where it stated, inter alia, that the list of SRM could probably be modulated in the light of the species, the age and the geographical origin of the animals in question.

In June 2000 the European Commission adopted a Decision on SRM (2000/418/EC), prohibiting the import of SRM from all Third Countries that have not been "satisfactorily" assessed with regard to their BSE-Risk.

In July 2000 the SSC adopted its final opinion on "the Geographical Risk of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (GBR)", which 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.

In September 2000 the Commission invited Third Countries that are authorised to export products to the EU that are listed in annex II to the above mentioned SRM-Decision, to provide a dossier for the assessment of their GBR. Until today 52 dossiers have been received from Third Countries, 32 are already assessed, and 19 are in different states of assessment.

This opinion concerns only one country, Panama. The Commission requested this opinion following the provision by the country of a dossier for the assessment of their epidemiological status with regard to BSE. The result will serve as essential input into its Decision concerning the treatment of exports from Panama with regard to SRMs and other relevant products. It is recommended that this opinion on Panama be read in the light of the GBR opinion of the SSC of July 2000.

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 SSC is further concerned of the less than optimal quality of the available information on international trade of products that could carry the BSE agent, in

particular bovine derived animal meals or bovine live animals. This is of particular relevance whenever the assessment of the GBR indicates that the BSE/cattle system of a country would (have) recycle(d) the BSE-agent.

THE ANALYSIS

During the reference period, 1980-2000, Panama was exposed to only **negligible** external challenges. According to the country dossier it has not imported any live cattle or MBM from the UK or any other BSE-affected country. This was largely confirmed by all data sources except for 4 pure-bred breeding bovines that were, according to Eurostat, exported from France to Panama in 1996. Since 1996 import of both, live bovine animals and ruminant products has been prohibited from BSE-affected countries.

Throughout the reference period, 1980-2000, the BSE/cattle system of Panama was **extremely unstable**. The feeding of MBM to cattle is still legal and MBM has always been included in domestically produced cattle feed. Rendering plants are said to operate at 133°C/20min/3bar but only for one plant certification of this was provided. It is unclear from the available information if other plants exist, if they also operate under these conditions, and if there is a legal basis for this that is controlled. There is no SRM ban and SRM are rendered, as is fallen stock. BSE was made notifiable on 2 May 1996. Surveillance was and is inefficient with regard to BSE. Cross contamination is not an issue as feeding MBM to cattle is still legal and voluntarily done.

According to the available data the extremely unstable BSE/cattle system of Panama was never exposed to any non-negligible external challenge. It is therefore regarded highly unlikely that one or several cattle that are (pre-clinically or clinically) infected with the BSE agent are currently present in the domestic herd of Panama (**GBR I**).

However, the SSC wants to point out that any indirect import of the BSE-agent via contaminated MBM or live cattle, or via commodities not taken into account in this assessment would, in view of the insufficient stability, put the country at risk of developing a BSE epidemic. It also would make a more thorough analysis of the rendering efficiency, the only potential stability enhancing factor, necessary.

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

A detailed report on the assessment of the GBR of Panama is published separately on the Internet. It was produced by the GBR-task force of the SSC-secretariat and peer reviewed by the GBR-Peer group. 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 co-operation of the country's authorities.

Panama – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, June 2001							
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY			INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY	
	1980-00: NEGLIGIBLE.		1980-00: EXTREMELY UNSTABLE				
GBR-Level	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	Surveillance, cross-contamination	
I	<p><u>UK:</u> No live cattle imports from UK (all data sources).</p> <p><u>Non UK:</u> No live cattle imports from any other BSE-affected country (all data sources), except probably 4 pure-bred breeding bovines, exported from France in 1996 to Panama (only Eurostat).</p>	<p><u>UK:</u> No MBM imports from UK (all data sources).</p> <p><u>Non UK:</u> No MBM imports from any BSE affected country (all data sources).</p>	<p>Not OK</p> <p>Feeding MBM to cattle is still legal and MBM was always included in domestically produced cattle feed.</p>	<p>Not OK</p> <p>Information on the rendering processes that are applied in the rendering industry is incomplete.</p>	<p>Not OK</p> <p>No SRM ban. SRM and fallen stock are rendered.</p>	<p><u>BSE Surveillance:</u> BSE notifiable since 1996. Surveillance found to be inefficient.</p> <p><u>Cross-contamination:</u> Not an issue as feeding MBM to cattle is still legal and practised.</p>	<p>According to the available data the extremely unstable BSE/cattle system was not exposed to any non-negligible external challenge, i.e. it is highly unlikely that the BSE-agent entered the country.</p> <p>However, the system was and is extremely unstable and any BSE infectivity that would have entered or would enter the country in the future would most likely also enter cattle feed. The BSE agent would be recycled and fast amplified.</p>
GBR-trend						<p>INTERNAL CHALLENGE</p> <p>Since 1980, internal challenge is highly unlikely to have occurred and to be present.</p>	