

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

adopted by the SSC on 7 November 2002

**Opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee on the  
GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY  
(GBR)  
in New Zealand – update 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 up-to-date GBR of New Zealand as assessed in November 2002.

**THE ANSWER**

Due to the fact that only negligible BSE infectivity entered the country, there was no risk that BSE infectivity was recycled or propagated. It is therefore concluded that it is highly unlikely that domestic cattle are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent (**GBR-I**).

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.

New Zealand 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 an up-to-date scientific opinion on the Geographical BSE risk of New Zealand.

## THE RISK ASSESSMENT

The SSC concluded that it was “highly unlikely” (**GBR I**) that domestic cattle in New Zealand are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent.

## THE ANALYSIS

### EXTERNAL CHALLENGE

As only very few cattle and no MBM were imported to New Zealand from BSE risk countries, the **external challenge** was always **negligible**.

### STABILITY

On the basis of the available information it was concluded that the country’s BSE/cattle system was **extremely unstable** from 1980 until today. This indicates that BSE infectivity, if imported, could have reached domestic cattle and could have been recycled and amplified.

### *Feeding*

Until 2000, it was legally possible to feed ruminant-MBM to cattle and a fraction of cattle feed is assumed to have included MBM. The voluntary ban of ruminant MBM from ruminant feed of 1996 might have reduced that risk, however, no evidence for the effectiveness of that de facto ban is available. Feeding is therefore considered “**not OK**” until 2000. As the official ban in 2000 was only a ruminant to ruminant feed ban and as long as no compliance data are available feeding remains “**not OK**”.

### *Rendering*

The rendering system was and is not able to significantly reduce BSE infectivity, should it be present in the raw material. For the time being rendering is therefore considered “**not OK**” throughout the entire period since 1980.

### *SRM-removal*

SRM and fallen bovine stock are rendered into feed. Therefore, SRM removal was and is “**not OK**”.

### *BSE surveillance*

The BSE surveillance is mainly passive and the number of cattle brains annually examined for BSE remained below the requirements of the OIE. Hence the BSE surveillance of New Zealand was not able to detect clinical BSE-cases, should they have occurred.

A targeted surveillance of risk populations started in December 2001. This includes the risk populations similar to the monitoring programme in the EU. First results were provided, although the number of cattle tested within these risk populations is limited.

## CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR

Due to the negligible risk that BSE-infectivity entered the country there was no risk that BSE-infectivity was recycled or propagated. It is therefore concluded that it is highly unlikely that domestic cattle are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent (**GBR-I**).

**EXPECTED DEVELOPMENT OF THE GBR**

As long as no external challenge occurs, the GBR will remain as low as it is. However, given the low stability of the system, any external challenge could lead to the building-up of an internal challenge.

*A table summarising 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 New Zealand 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.*

**New Zealand – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, November 2002**

EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY	
		1980-today: Extremely unstable					
GBR-Level	1980-2001: Negligible	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	BSE surveillance		
	<p><b>Live Cattle imports</b></p> <p>UK: 13 according to country import data and 274 according to Eurostat and other data.</p> <p><u>Other BSE risk countries:</u> no cattle according to the country import data. According to Eurostat and other data, 91 from Germany and Ireland.</p> <p><u>Comment:</u> most probably only 13 cattle from UK were imported.</p>	<p><b>MBM imports</b></p> <p>UK: no imports according to country import data and 6 t according to Eurostat and other data.</p> <p><u>Other BSE risk countries:</u> According to country import data: no imports from 1980 until today.</p> <p>According to Eurostat and other data: no imports from 1980 until today.</p> <p><u>Comment:</u> it seems unlikely that the 6 tons were imported.</p>	<p><b>Feeding</b></p> <p>• Until 2000, it was legally possible to feed ruminant-MBM to cattle and a fraction of cattle feed is assumed to have included MBM. The voluntary ban of ruminant MBM from ruminant feed of 1996 might have reduced that risk, however, no evidence for the effectiveness of that de facto ban is available. Feeding is therefore considered “<b>not OK</b>” until 2000. As the official ban in 2000 was only a ruminant to ruminant feed ban and as long as no compliance data are available feeding will remain “<b>not OK</b>”.</p>	<p><b>Rendering</b></p> <p>• The rendering system was and is not able to significantly reduce BSE infectivity, should it be present in the raw material. For the time being rendering is therefore considered “<b>not OK</b>” throughout the entire period since 1980.</p>	<p><b>SRM-removal</b></p> <p>• SRM and fallen bovine stock are rendered into feed. Therefore, SRM removal was and is “<b>not OK</b>”.</p>	<p><b>BSE surveillance</b></p> <p>• BSE listed as notifiable disease in 1989.</p> <p>• Awareness training since 1990.</p> <p>• BSE-surveillance since 1989 but not adequate to detect low level of clinical BSE incidence.</p> <p>• Clear improvement of the surveillance since beginning of 2002.</p>	<p>The BSE/cattle system of New Zealand was since 1980 not exposed to a significant external challenge.</p> <p><b>INTERNAL CHALLENGE</b></p> <p>The occurrence of an internal challenge since 1980 is regarded highly unlikely.</p>