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

adopted by the SSC on 10 April 2003

Opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee on the GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (GBR) in Argentina – update 2003

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 Argentina as assessed in April 2003

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 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.

Argentina 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 Argentina.

THE RISK ASSESSMENT

The SSC concluded that it was “highly unlikely” **(GBR I)** that domestic cattle in Argentina 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 Argentina 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 **very unstable** from 1980 until June 2002 and **neutrally stable** from July 2002 until today. This indicates that until the middle of 2002 the BSE agent, should it have entered the Argentinean territory could have been recycled and amplified. From the second half of 2002 onwards, the BSE agent, should it have entered could have been recycled but the chance that it reached the cattle via feed decreased remarkably.

Feeding

Feeding of MBM to cattle was legally possible until 1995, even if apparently uncommon. Feeding ruminant MBM to cattle was officially banned in 1995. Controls of this feed ban only started in 1997 using techniques with a relative high detection limit. Experience in EU has shown that ruminant MBM to ruminant feed bans are extremely difficult to control. It is hence assumed that feeding was **"not OK"** for the period 1980-middle of 2002. From the second half of 2002 it is considered **"OK"** because evidence was provided that the mammalian MBM to ruminant feed ban was properly implemented and controlled.

Rendering

The rendering systems do not appear to meet the 133°C/3 bar/20 min. standard. It can be assumed that the process has only a reduced BSE-inactivation capacity. Should BSE enter the rendering, the produced MBM would probably still contain significant fractions of the incoming infectivity, therefore rendering is assessed as **"not OK"** throughout the reference period.

SRM-removal

Brains and spinal cords from cattle fit for human consumption are usually intended for human consumption. From 2002, a partial SRM ban is implemented covering only brain and spinal cord. SRM from condemned cattle or fallen stock is digested and buried or sent to landfill and it is unlikely that it could reach cattle. This stability factor can be therefore considered to be **"reasonably OK"** throughout the reference period.

BSE surveillance

Regarding the surveillance system up to now, Argentina would probably not have been able to detect small numbers of clinical BSE-cases. The new measures will, if suitable numbers of high-risk animals are tested, improve the surveillance.

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. The relative good stability of the BSE/cattle system almost fully depends on proper feedingstuff controls.

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 Argentina 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.

Scientific Steering Committee – Opinion on the GBR of Argentina **April 2003**

Argentina – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, April 2003

	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-2001: Negligible		**1980-June 2002: very unstable July 2002-today: neutrally stable**				The BSE/cattle system of Argentina was since 1980 not exposed to a significant external challenge.
GBR-Level	***Live Cattle imports***	***MBM imports***	***Feeding***	***Rendering***	***SRM-removal***	***BSE surveillance***	
I **GBR-trend**	UK: 19 cattle according to the country import data. 103 according to Eurostat. Other BSE risk countries: 101 cattle according to the country import data from IT, ES, DE, CH. Data are largely compatible with Eurostat and other data. Comment: Argentina provided evidences that only 2 cattle were imported from the UK in 1982. It is assumed that the total number of imported cattle from the UK is 24.	UK: No imports according to the country import data. Confirmed by Eurostat and other data. Other BSE risk countries: No imports according to the country import data. Confirmed by Eurostat and other data.	**Not OK 1980-middle 2002; since middle 2002 reasonable OK** Feeding of MBM to cattle was legally possible until 1995. Feeding ruminant MBM to cattle was officially banned in 1995. From the second half of 2002 mammalian MBM to ruminant feed ban properly implemented and controlled.	**Not OK 1980-today** The rendering systems do not appear to meet the 133°C/3 bar/20 min. standard.	**Reasonably OK 1980-today.** Brains and spinal cord from cattle fit for human consumption are usually intended for human consumption. From 2002 a partial SRM ban covering only brain and spinal cord. SRM from condemned cattle or fallen stock is not rendered.	BSE is notifiable since 1997 (1990). The surveillance system used up to now would most probably not have been able to detect small numbers of clinical BSE-cases. The new measures will, if suitable numbers of high-risk animals are tested, improve the surveillance.	**INTERNAL CHALLENGE** The occurrence of an internal challenge since 1980is regarded highly unlikely