

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

adopted by the SSC on 10 April 2003

Opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee on the GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (GBR) in Lithuania – 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 Lithuania as assessed in April 2003.

THE ANSWER

The BSE-agent may have reached the territory of Lithuania before its independence in 1991. After 1995 significant amounts of live-cattle and MBM were imported from BSE risk countries. A significant risk that BSE infectivity entered processing therefore exists since some years, at the latest since 1999, when domestic cattle potentially exposed to contaminated imported MBM around 1995, could have entered processing while approaching the end of the incubation period. Given the instability of the system, this could have lead to BSE cases.

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

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.

Lithuania 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 Lithuania.

THE RISK ASSESSMENT

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

THE ANALYSIS

EXTERNAL CHALLENGE

- The level of the external challenge that has to be met by the BSE/cattle system is estimated according to the guidance given by the SSC in its final opinion on the GBR of July 2000 (as updated in January 2002). This assessment takes account of the available information on the origin and use made of the imported cattle and MBM.
- Live cattle imports: No data were available for the period before 1991. In total Lithuania imported over the period 1991 to 2001 2,045 live cattle (CD) from BSE-risk countries, of which none (CD) came from the UK. This assessment takes into account the different aspects discussed in the report that allow to assume that certain imported cattle did not enter the domestic BSE/cattle system, i.e. were not rendered into feed.
- MBM imports: No data were available for the period before 1991. In total Lithuania imported over the period 1991 to 2001 36,751 tons of MBM (CD data) from BSE-risk countries, of which 325 tons (CD data) came from the UK.

STABILITY

No information was available on the BSE/cattle system on the territory of Lithuania before 1991 but it is assumed that it was not more stable than in Lithuania after its independence. On the basis of the available information it was concluded that the country’s BSE/cattle system was extremely unstable from 1991 to 2000; i.e. it would have recycled and amplified BSE infectivity, should it have entered the system. The same is probably true for the situation before 1991. With the feed ban of 2001 and the introduction of a SRM ban the system improved to unstable.

Feeding

Feeding MBM to cattle was legally possible until December 2000 and probably happened, even if it was/is uncommon practice for cattle for economic reasons. As long as effective enforcement of the feed ban of December 2000 (“total” feed ban) and measures against cross contamination is not confirmed, it can still not be excluded. In the light of the available information feeding is assessed “**not OK**” until 2000 and “**reasonably OK**” since 2001.

Rendering

Rendering is and was common practice in Lithuania. Raw material included ruminant material, including SRM and fallen stock at least until the end of 2000. The processes currently used could be adequate for reducing BSE-infectivity but in view of lack of evidence of their correct application it is assessed that rendering is and was “**not OK**” throughout the whole reference period.

SRM-removal

There was no SRM ban until March 2001 and the recently introduced measures are not appropriately implemented, monitored and controlled. Therefore, SRM removal was regarded as “**not OK**” before 2001 and “**reasonably OK**” since then.

BSE surveillance

The surveillance system in place before 2001 was inefficient and therefore reduced the stability of the system. The active surveillance system introduced in 2001 so far cannot improve the stability of the system.

CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR

The BSE-agent may have reached the territory of Lithuania before its independence in 1991. After 1995 significant amounts of live-cattle and more important of MBM were imported from BSE risk countries. A significant risk that BSE infectivity entered processing therefore exists since some years, at the latest since 2000, when domestic cattle potentially exposed to contaminated imported MBM around 1995, could have entered processing while approaching the end of the incubation period. Given the instability of the system, this could have lead to BSE cases.

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

EXPECTED DEVELOPMENT OF THE GBR

As long as the system remains unstable, the probability of cattle to be (pre-clinically or clinically) infected with the BSE-agent will further increase, even if no additional external challenges occur.

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 Lithuania 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.

LITHUANIA – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, April 2003							
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-1990: Significant 1991-1995: High 1996-2000: Very high		1980-2000: Extremely unstable Since 2001: Unstable				It is likely, that the BSE-agent could have entered the territory of Lithuania via imports even before the independence.
GBR-Level	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	BSE surveillance	
III	<p>UK: No imports according to country import data and according to Eurostat and other export data.</p> <p>Other BSE risk countries: 2,045 according to the country import data. According to Eurostat and other export data, 1,911 from DE, DK, CZ and CH.</p>	<p>UK: 325 tons according to country import data. According to Eurostat and other export data 233 tons.</p> <p>Other BSE risk countries: According to country import data: 91-95: 1,019 t 96-2000: 35,407 t Total: 36,426 t</p> <p>According to Eurostat and other export data: 91-95: 1,019 t 96-2000: 35,646 t Total: 36,665 t</p> <p>Comment: Imports from UK: it is assumed that all MBM from UK was poultry MBM.</p>	<p>Not OK 1980-2000, reasonably OK since 2001.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No clear information provided on control of the December 2000 “total” feed ban. More than 40% of the feed mills produced ruminant and non-ruminant feed, often on same production lines. Since December 2000 MBM prohibited from being fed to any farmed animal. It is not clear if systematic feed controls take place. Imported feed is sampled and examined since 2002. 	<p>Not OK 1980-2001.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is claimed that rendering is carried out under adequate conditions (133°C, 3^{bar}, 20^{min}) but it is not clear since when. No evidence for appropriate application of these rendering conditions were provided. MBM is incinerated. 	<p>Not OK 1980-2000, reasonably OK since 2001</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SRM included into rendering. Fallen stock normally not rendered but buried, mainly because of low capacity of the rendering industry. However, fallen stock could well be rendered. MBM from SRM is incinerated. 	<p>BSE since February 2001 compulsory notifiable. Rapid test used since middle 2001.</p> <p>Active surveillance in place since middle 2001. Mainly focused on healthy slaughtered cattle. In principle the program covers the same animal categories as in the EU. evaluation. This probably is rectified by the surveillance in 2002.</p>	<p>After the independence, significant live cattle and MBM imports started in 1995 and met an extremely unstable system. Since 2001 this system is unstable, i.e. it still recycles BSE infectivity faster than it disappears from the system.</p>
GBR-trend							INTERNAL CHALLENGE
increasing							<p>It is likely that an internal challenge emerged in the territory of Lithuania already before 1991 and that it continued to exist and to grow, due to the extremely unstable system.</p> <p>In any case an internal challenge in Lithuania is very likely to exist since 1995.</p>