

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

Adopted on 09/02/2001

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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 Nicaragua.

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)". This opinion 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-assessment were published on the Internet for each of these countries.

In September 2000 the Commission invited 46 Third Countries, which 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 28 dossiers have been received and 27 are in an advanced state of assessment.

This opinion concerns only one country, Nicaragua. The Commission requested this opinion as essential input into its Decision concerning the treatment of SRM that will be requested from Nicaragua.

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 ANALYSIS

Nicaragua was exposed to a **negligible external challenge** throughout the reference period (1980-1999). No imports of live cattle nor of MBM, MM, BM or Greaves from countries that are affected by BSE have been registered by the national system nor were such exports recorded in Eurostat or UK export data. Hence it is highly unlikely that the BSE agent was imported into the country.

The BSE/cattle system of Nicaragua was and is **unstable**. No MBM feed ban exists although it is unlikely that MBM is fed to cattle. However since no information is provided why cattle will not receive supplementary feed, some might do. No MBM has ever been imported and the rendering in the two MBM-plants in Nicaragua is “reasonably OK” because the process parameters are equivalent with the $133^{\circ}\text{C}/20^{\text{min}}/3^{\text{bar}}$ standard. However, also on rendering it is not clear whether the process is properly controlled. Man normally eats brains and spinal cord, but it is not clear whether not any SRM or fallen stock is rendered.

In view of the negligible external challenge it is therefore concluded that it is 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 Nicaragua (**GRB-I**).

Given the very unstable system, it is likely that the GBR-level will increase in the future, if any external challenge occurs.

This favourable assessment is mainly depending on the negligible external challenge. If this assumption should be proven wrong, the assessment would have to be revised.

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 Nicaragua 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 good co-operation of the country's authorities.

Nicaragua - Summary of the GBR-Assessment, February 2001							
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION OF EXTERNAL CHALLENGE AND STABILITY
	Negligible		Unstable				
GBR-Level	Live Cattle	MBM	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	Surveillance, cross-contamination	
I	No imports have taken place from UK or other BSE-affected countries.	No imports have taken place from the UK or other BSE-affected countries.	Not OK No MBM feed-ban. It is unlikely that MBM is fed to cattle, but no reasons are provided for this.	Reasonably OK Rendering process seems equivalent to the 133°C/20 ^{min} /3 ^{bar} standard, but insufficient information is provided. SRM and fallen stock are apparently not rendered.	Reasonably OK Brain and spinal cord is for human consumption, but no evidence is provided that all SRM is excluded from rendering.	Surveillance: BSE not notifiable and no training nor surveillance in place. Cross-contamination: No measures in place because not prohibited.	No external challenge occurred. If an external challenge would occur, it could reach domestic cattle and the unstable system would recycle and amplify the introduced infectivity.
GBR-trend							INTERNAL CHALLENGE
Constant							Highly unlikely to have been present at any time because BSE-infectivity was never imported.