

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

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 Lithuania.

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 from 01 April 2001 onwards 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, Lithuania. The Commission requested this opinion as essential input into its Decision concerning the treatment of SRM that will be requested from Lithuania.

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

No data on imports to the Lithuanian territory were available for the period before 1993. Since 1993 Lithuania imported about 1,900 live cattle from DE (1,703) and DK (215), and about 30,800 tons of MBM from DK (24,590), BE (3,001), IT (1,867), NL (504), IRE (430), DE (385) and UK (144)¹. Hence Lithuania was exposed to a **very high external challenge**, building-up since 1993/94. It is therefore highly likely that the BSE agent was imported into the country.

The BSE/cattle system of Lithuania was and is **extremely unstable**. This assessment derives from the fact that feeding of MBM to cattle was legally possible until Dec.2000 and no evidence is provided that it didn't occur. Feed controls were not carried out. While the rendering process is in principle equivalent to the 133°C/20^{min}/3^{bar} standard, the equipment is outdated and proper process conditions cannot be assumed. Improved control measures are foreseen. SRM and fallen stock was rendered for feed but since 1 February 2001 SRM are to be destroyed. Surveillance was inappropriate until very recently but since 1/02/01 new measures are in force likely to significantly improve it.

It is therefore concluded that it is highly likely that one or several cattle that are (pre-clinically or clinically) infected with the BSE agent are currently present in the domestic herd of Lithuania (**GBR-III**).

Given the extremely unstable system and that the BSE is most likely already present in the country, it is likely that the GBR will further increase, even if external challenges could be avoided. Pending the correct implementation of the measures announced, the BSE/cattle system can become stable over time, leading to a decreasing GBR.

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 Lithuania 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.

¹ All data according to EUROSTAT export records. Lithuanian import data were significantly lower and did not refer to other countries of origin for MBM than DK.

Lithuania - Summary of the GBR-Assessment, February 2001							
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION EXTERNAL CHALLENGE / STABILITY
	80-93: no data; since 94 very high		Extremely unstable				
GBR-Level	Live Cattle	MBM	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	Surveillance, cross-contamination	
III	Live cattle imports are recorded since 1993, since then about 1,900 cattle were imported from DE (1,703) and DK (215), representing a low external challenge.	MBM imports were recorded since 1994. While the country dossier only indicates imports of 12,920 tons from DK, Eurostat recorded 30,777 tons from DK (24,590 tons), BE (3,001 tons), IT (1,867 tons), NL (504 tons), IRE (430 tons), DE (385 tons) and UK (144 tons). Even if some of these were only on transit, as claimed, it represented a very high external challenge	Not OK Feeding MBM to cattle was legally possible until Dec. 2000 and there are no feed controls. While feeding MBM to cattle is claimed to be uncommon, it is also stated that 20% of the MBM imported from DK was dedicated to cattle.	Not OK The rendering process is in principle equivalent to 133°C/20 ^{min} /3 ^{bar} but to outdated equipment and lack of controls.	Not OK. No SRM-ban before 01/02/01 and rendering of fallen stock.	<p><u>Surveillance:</u> Insufficient until Feb 2001, even if training for laboratory personnel started in 1996/98, for general veterinarians in 2000. The planned measures will strongly improve it.</p> <p><u>Cross-contamination:</u> No measures or controls in place to prevent cross-contamination. New measures might still not be sufficient. Feed controls essential to be introduced.</p>	<p>Since 1994, Lithuania was exposed to a very high external challenge, mainly resulting from imports of potentially contaminated MBM. This makes it highly likely that the BSE agent was imported. Given the extremely unstable system an internal challenge most likely appeared since 1994/95, because the feeding system in Lithuania did and does not actively prevent feeding of (imported or domestic) MBM to cattle. This internal challenge most probably was (and will be) recycled and amplified, growing over time. The high external challenges supported this development.</p>
GBR-trend							INTERNAL CHALLENGE
increasing							Likely to be present since 1994/95 and growing.