

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

Adopted by the SSC on 13 September 2002

**Opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee on the updated  
GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY  
(GBR)  
in Slovenia – September 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 Slovenia as assessed in June 2002.

## **THE ANSWER**

The BSE-agent was potentially imported into the country via infected MBM in the mid 90s when MBM imports peaked. This MBM reached cattle via feed. It can be expected that the 1997 birth cohort had a much lower chance to be infected because MBM imports decreased dramatically and the first feed ban was introduced. Although the rendering system was able to reduce BSE infectivity since 1992, some recycling and propagation may have occurred because SRM were not removed and therefore rendered.

The first domestic BSE-case in Slovenia was identified in November 2001 and a second case was confirmed in January 2002. It is therefore confirmed (**GBR III**) that domestic cattle in Slovenia are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent at a low incidence.

## **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.

Slovenia 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 Slovenia.

## THE RISK ASSESSMENT

For Slovenia, the SSC concluded that it was confirmed (**GBR III**) that domestic cattle in Slovenia are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent at a low incidence.

## THE ANALYSIS

### EXTERNAL CHALLENGE

Slovenia became independent in 1992. Separate data for Slovenia is only available since 1992 and therefore, the external challenge experienced by Slovenia could only be determined from 1992 onwards. Nevertheless, the external challenge from 1980 to 1991 is regarded as **always significant**, based on imports by the Former Yugoslavia.

- Live cattle imports: From 1992 to 2000, the country imported 492,792 live cattle from BSE risk countries (CD), of which none came from the UK. Together these imports represent a **high external challenge**. Broken down to 5 year periods the external challenge was high from 1992-1995 and moderate from 1996-2000. This assessment takes into account the different aspects discussed above that allow to assume that certain imported cattle (around 420,000) did not enter the domestic BSE/cattle system, i.e. were not rendered into feed.
- MBM imports: From 1992 to 2000, the country imported 5,027 tons MBM from BSE risk countries, of which nothing came from the UK (CD). Together these imports represent a **high external challenge**. Broken down to 5 year periods the external challenge was moderate from 1992-1995 and high from 1996-2000. This assessment takes into account different aspects that allow to assume that certain imported MBM did not enter the domestic BSE/cattle system or did not represent an external challenge for other reasons.

### STABILITY

On the basis of the available information it was concluded that the country's BSE/cattle system was **neutrally stable** from **1992 to 2000**, and is **very stable** since **2001**, i.e. it would have not recycled and amplified BSE infectivity, should it have entered the system.

The system became "very stable" in 2001 when rules on the removal of SRM were introduced.

For the period 1980-1991 the stability is not addressed as only insufficient data were available on stability factors for Former Yugoslavia.

### Feeding

Until 1996, it was legally possible to feed MBM to cattle and a certain fraction of cattle feed (for calves and dairy cattle) is assumed to have contained MBM. Therefore feeding is **not OK** until the end of 1996 (first feed ban introduced in May 1996) because controls were insufficient in 1996. Since 1997 feeding has been **reasonably OK**. As the total feed ban has been enforced since January 2001, but enforcement activities (controls) are still not convincing feeding remains **reasonably OK**.

### Rendering

Rendering is not assessed before 1992 (insufficient information available on the situation in former Yugoslavia). The heat treatment used since 1992 is known to reduce BSE infectivity. It was convincingly applied because of the high Anthrax prevalence in the country, requiring these severe rendering conditions. It is therefore assessed as **OK** since 1992.

**SRM-removal**

There was no SRM ban before 30 November 2000 and SRM and fallen stock was rendered. Therefore SRM-removal is assessed as **not OK** from 1992-2000, as no information is provided on control procedures. Since January 2001, SRM and fallen stock is rendered and all MBM is stored under control waiting for incineration, therefore SRM-removal is regarded **OK** since then.

**BSE surveillance**

Passive BSE surveillance is in place in small scale since 1992 and was intensified in 1996. Since January 2001, active surveillance is carried out on a similar level as laid down in the TSE-Regulation of the EU. This targeted active surveillance has substantially improved the ability to find BSE-infected animals, as demonstrated by the first two cases found in November 2001 and January 2002. It is concluded that the impact of surveillance on the stability was neutral since 1996 and is enhancing the stability since 2001.

**CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR**

The BSE-agent was potentially imported into the country via infected MBM in the mid 90s when MBM imports peaked. This MBM reached cattle via feed. It can be expected that the 1997 birth cohort had a much lower chance to be infected because MBM imports decreased dramatically and the first feed ban was introduced. Although the rendering system was able to reduce BSE infectivity since 1992, some recycling and propagation may have occurred because SRM were not removed and therefore rendered.

The first domestic BSE-case in Slovenia was identified in November 2001 and a second case was confirmed in January 2002. It is therefore confirmed (**GBR III**) that domestic cattle in Slovenia are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent at a low incidence.

**EXPECTED DEVELOPMENT OF THE GBR**

Assuming that measures in place continue to be appropriately implemented the GBR will decrease over time at the rate at which already infected animals leave the system. However, this does not exclude that animals infected in the past may be discovered as clinical cases in the future.

If the measures in place are effectively implemented import of live animals cannot increase the risk because the infectivity that could theoretically be harboured by them would not reach domestic cattle.

*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 Slovenia 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.*

SLOVENIA – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, September 2002						
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY			INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-1991: Significant 1992-2000: High		1980-1991: Not addressed 1992-2000: Neutrally stable 2001: Very stable			Since 1992, while the system was neutrally stable until 2000, and very stable since 2001, Slovenia faced a continuous very high external challenge mainly due to imports of live cattle from BSE risk countries and due to MBM imports. Should indeed infected cattle have been imported since 1992, they could have been slaughtered relatively young, if imported young for fattening. They also might have been already older at slaughter if imported for immediate slaughter at higher age, or, if imported as breeding animals and being slaughtered several years after import. In any case they would have ended-up in a rendering process able to significantly reduce BSE infectivity. Since 1997 also the feeding was reasonably OK, indicating that the risk that MBM reached domestic cattle was somewhat reduced.
GBR-Level	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	
III	<p>UK: No imports according to country import data and to other export data.</p> <p>Other BSE risk countries: 492,792 according to the country import data. According to other export data, 108,701 from AT, CZ, DK, FR, DE, HU, IT, NL, PL, RO and SK.</p>	<p>UK: No imports according to country import data and to other export data.</p> <p>Other BSE risk countries: According to country import data: 80-85: 628 t 86-90: 2,048 t 91-95: 770 t 96-2000: 1,580 t Total: 5,027 t</p> <p>According to other export data: 80-85: 0 t 86-90: 0 t 91-95: 147 t 96-2000: 1,513 t Total: 1,660 t</p>	<p><b>Not OK 1992-1996, Reasonably OK 1997-2001.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Until 1996, legally possible to feed MBM to cattle and certain fraction of cattle feed (for calves and dairy cattle) is assumed to have contained MBM.</li> <li>First feed ban introduced in May 1996, but controls insufficient in 1996.</li> <li>Total feed ban enforced since January 2001, but enforcement activities (controls) still not convincing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>OK 1992-2001.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rendering not assessed before 1992 (insufficient information available on the situation in former Yugoslavia).</li> <li>Heat treatment used since 1992 known to reduce BSE infectivity.</li> <li>Rendering conditions were applied because of high Anthrax prevalence in the country, requiring these severe rendering conditions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Not OK 1992-2000, OK since 2001.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No SRM ban before 30 November 2000 and SRM and fallen stock were rendered.</li> <li>Since January 2001, SRM and fallen stock rendered but all MBM is stored under control waiting for incineration.</li> </ul>	<p>BSE listed as notifiable disease since 1995. Passive BSE surveillance in place in small scale since 1992 and intensified in 1996. Since January 2001, active surveillance carried out on a similar level as laid down in the TSE-Regulation of the EU. This active surveillance has substantially improved the ability to find BSE-infected animals, as demonstrated by first two cases found in November 2001 and January 2002.</p>
GBR-trend						<b>INTERNAL CHALLENGE</b>
decreasing						An internal challenge was likely to be present since 1992 but the neutrally stable system kept it at the level at which it has been introduced. Since 2001 the system is very stable. It can be expected that the internal challenge declines at the rate at which cattle born before the system reached the very stable situation leave the system.