

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

Adopted by the SSC on 6 December 2002

**Opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee on the  
GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY  
(GBR)  
in GREECE – 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 GBR of Greece as assessed in 2002.

### **THE ANSWER**

The BSE-agent was most likely imported into the country and could have reached domestic cattle via cross-contamination in feed mills, during transport or on farm. It is therefore concluded that it is likely that one or several cattle infected (pre-clinically or clinically) with the BSE agent are currently in the domestic cattle population of Greece (**GBR III**). This is supported by the domestic case identified in 2001.

### **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.

Greece 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 scientific opinion on the Geographical BSE risk of Greece.

### **THE RISK ASSESSMENT**

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

## THE ANALYSIS

### EXTERNAL CHALLENGE

Greece was exposed to a very high external challenge from 1980 to 1995 and to an extremely high external challenge from 1996 to 2000. This external challenge resulted from MBM and live cattle imports.

Taking into account the available information on the origin and use made of the imported cattle and MBM it is concluded that the external challenge from cattle imports in the eighties was moderate. It was high in the nineties. On the other hand MBM imports were posing a very high external challenge from 1980 to 1995, and an extremely high external challenge from 1996 to 2000.

### STABILITY

On the basis of the available information it was concluded that the country's BSE/cattle system was extremely unstable from 1980 to 1998, very unstable from 1999 to 2000 and is neutrally stable since 2001.

### *Feeding*

Feeding ruminant MBM to cattle was legally possible until 1994. The available information on the control of the feed-ban of 1994 does not allow judging its efficiency. Therefore, feeding is considered "**Not OK**" before and after the ban until the end of 2000. Since 1/1/2001, when the total feed ban of the EU was officially implemented feeding is considered "**reasonably OK**" because Greece did not provide any evidence that the feed ban is also enforced with on-farm-mixers.

### *Rendering*

Materials rendered include ruminant material. SRM and probably (some) fallen stock were included in rendering until the end of 2000. Before the end of 1997 rendering processes were not appropriate. Although the CD states that rendering plants were brought up to standard in 1997, no evidence for controls of appropriate process conditions was provided. Also the FVO report from the end of 1998 indicates that several rendering plants did not fully respect the pressure standard. Therefore rendering is assessed "**not OK**" until the end of 1998. Since 1999 rendering is considered "**reasonably OK**". If evidence would be provided that all plants reliably apply the  $133^{\circ}\text{C}/20^{\text{min}}/3^{\text{bar}}$  standard to all materials rendered, it could be considered being "**OK**".

### *SRM-removal*

There is an official SRM ban since the end of 2000 but evidence for reliable implementation is lacking. SRM was "**not OK**" until the end of 2000 and "**reasonably OK**" thereafter.

### *BSE surveillance*

The passive surveillance system, which was the only system in place until the end of 2000 was unable to detect low levels of BSE incidence. The passive surveillance system i.e. notification and examination of clinical cases is still insufficient.

The situation improved since 1 January 2001, when an active surveillance system was installed in parallel to the passive system. However, it seems that also the active surveillance system is not carried out satisfactorily due to a most probable underreporting of BSE risk animals (fallen stock). Although the first BSE case in Greece was detected by active surveillance, so far the number of

examinations that have been carried out do not allow an estimation of the size of the epidemic in Greece.

### **CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR**

The BSE-agent was most likely imported into the country and could have reached domestic cattle via cross-contamination in feed mills, during transport or on farm. It is therefore concluded that it is likely that one or several cattle infected (pre-clinically or clinically) with the BSE agent are currently in the domestic cattle population of Greece (**GBR III**). This is confirmed by the domestic case identified in 2001.

### **EXPECTED DEVELOPMENT OF THE GBR**

As long as the system remains neutrally stable, the probability of cattle to be pre-clinically or clinically infected with the BSE-agent will remain but will not grow anymore even if the external challenge continues to be at such a high level as in the past.

*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 Greece 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.*

GREECE – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, December 2002							
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-1995: Very high 1996-2000: Extremely high		1980-1998: Extremely unstable 1999-2000: Very unstable 2001: Neutrally stable				Given the extremely unstable system it is likely that BSE infectivity was recycled and propagated as soon as it entered processing; i.e. since 1984. Recycling and propagation continued to be highly likely until 2000 and is constant since then.
GBR-Level	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	BSE surveillance	INTERNAL CHALLENGE
III	UK: 0 according to country import data and 5 according to Eurostat and other data.	UK: 198 t according to country import data and 3,138 t according to Eurostat and other data.	"Not OK" until the end of 2000	"Not OK" until the end of 1998.	"Not OK" until the end of 2000.	BSE listed as notifiable disease since 1992.	
GBR-trend	Other BSE risk countries: 980,641 according to the country import data. According to Eurostat and other data, 521,559 from AU, BE, CY, CZ, DK, FR, DE, HU, IE, IT, LU, NL, PL, PO, RO, SK, SL, SP.	Other BSE risk countries: According to country import data: 80-85: 16,168 t 86-90: 80,339 t 91-95: 20,269 t 96-2000: 50,088 t Total: 166,864 t  According to Eurostat and other data: 80-85: 67,957 t 86-90: 65,323 t 91-95: 63,941 t 96-2000: 79,011 t Total: 276,232 t	Since 1/1/2001, "reasonably OK", due to implementation of total feed ban. However, on-farm mixers still not controlled.	Since 1999 rendering is considered "reasonably OK".  If evidence would be provided that all plants reliably apply 133°C/20 <sup>min</sup> /3 <sup>bar</sup> to all materials rendered, it could be considered being "OK".	Since 2001, "reasonably OK" (evidence for reliable implementation of SRM ban is lacking)	Active surveillance system in place since beginning of 2001 (complying with EC rules)	
stable							