

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

adopted by the SSC on 10 April 2003

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

THE ANSWER

The BSE-agent may have reached the territory of Belarus already before its independence in 1991. Since 1991 significant amounts of MBM were imported from BSE risk countries. A significant risk that BSE infectivity entered processing therefore exists since the middle of the nineties, when domestic cattle potentially exposed to contaminated imported MBM, 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 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 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.

Belarus 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 Belarus.

THE RISK ASSESSMENT

The SSC concluded that it was “likely but not confirmed” (**GBR III**) that domestic cattle in Belarus 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 2002). This assessment takes account of the available information on the origin and use made of the imported cattle and MBM.
- Live cattle imports: Over the period 1991 to 2001, Belarus imported 457 live cattle from BSE risk countries, of which none came from the UK. Belarus provided data on cattle imports into its territory before the independence from the Soviet Union. According to these data more than 4,800 cattle have been imported. 101 of these cattle came from the UK.
- MBM imports: Over the period from 1991 to 2000, Belarus imported 19,600 tons of MBM and in 2001 another 1,106 tons of MBM from BSE-risk countries, of which none came from the United Kingdom.

STABILITY

No information was available on the BSE/cattle system in the territory of Belarus before 1991 but it is assumed that it was not more stable than in Belarus 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 introduction of a mammalian MBM to ruminant feed ban in 2001 the system improved to very unstable.

Feeding

There is no information on the existence of a feed ban before February 2001 and the information on feeding is not substantiated. Therefore, feeding is considered “**not OK**” since 1980 until 2000.

Although the analytical method used since 2001 to control the mammalian MBM to ruminants feed ban, introduced in 2001 is species sensitive, this method seems not to be fully suitable to control cross-contamination if the MBM used for feed production has been processed using adequate processing parameters. Feeding is therefore “**reasonably OK**” since 2001.

Rendering

The information provided on rendering is unclear and it is assumed that high-risk material is processed under suboptimal conditions. Rendering is therefore “**not OK**” throughout the reference period.

SRM-removal

SRM is not removed and is entering the feed chain after processing, as does fallen stock. Therefore, SRM removal is considered “**not OK**” throughout the reference period.

BSE surveillance

BSE surveillance is not adequate to detect low level of clinical BSE incidence.

CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR

The BSE-agent may have reached the territory of Belarus before its independence in 1991. Since 1991 significant amounts of MBM were imported from BSE risk countries. A significant risk that BSE infectivity entered processing therefore exists since the middle of the nineties, when domestic cattle potentially exposed to contaminated imported MBM, 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 Belarus 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.

BELARUS – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, April 2003							
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-1990: Significant 1991-2000: Very high 2001-: High		1980-2000: Extremely unstable 2001-today: Very unstable				It is likely, that the BSE-agent could have entered the territory of Belarus via imports of live cattle even before its independence.
GBR-Level	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	BSE surveillance	
III	UK: 101 between 1986-1989 according to country import data and no cattle according to Eurostat and other export data.	UK: no imports according to country import and Eurostat and other export data. <u>Other BSE risk countries:</u> According to country import data: year of import not specified: Total: 19,600 t According to Eurostat and other export data: 91-95: 1,274 t 96-2000: 17,480 t 2001: 1,106 t Total: 19,860 t	Not OK 1980-2000, reasonably OK since 2001. Feed ban (mammalian MBM to ruminants) only introduced in 2001. Controls not convincing so far.	Not OK 1980-today. Information provided is poor. It is assumed that rendering conditions are not reaching the 133°C, 3 ^{bar} , 20 ^{min} standard.	Not OK 1980-today. No SRM ban in place. SRM is rendered under non-adequate conditions. Part of the fallen stock is also rendered. MBM from SRM is used for feed.	BSE notifiable since March 2001. Since 2001, cattle with CNS symptoms are tested for BSE (passive surveillance). “Active surveillance” targeted on healthy slaughtered cattle.	After the independence, significant MBM imports started in the early nineties and met an extremely unstable system. Since 2001 the system is very unstable, i.e. it still recycles BSE infectivity faster than it disappears from the system.
GBR-trend	<u>Other BSE risk countries:</u> According to country import data: from 1986-1990 4,831 and from 1991-2000 457 cattle. According to Eurostat and other export data, from 1991-2000, 416 cattle						INTERNAL CHALLENGE
increasing							It is very likely that an internal challenge emerged in the territory of Belarus already before 1991 due to live cattle imports and that it continued to exist and to grow, due to the extremely unstable system. In any case an internal challenge in Belarus is very likely to exist since the early nineties mainly due to MBM imports.