

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

adopted by the SSC on 10 April 2003

**Opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee on the  
GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY  
(GBR)  
in COSTA RICA – update 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 up-to-date GBR of Costa Rica as assessed in April 2003.

## **THE ANSWER**

From 1991 to 1995, the extremely unstable system of Costa Rica was exposed to a low external challenge due to the imports of live cattle and MBM from BSE-risk countries. This level of external challenge could have led to an internal challenge from 1995 onwards. It is concluded that it is unlikely but cannot be excluded that domestic cattle are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with BSE-agent (**GBR II**).

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.

Costa Rica 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 Costa Rica

## THE RISK ASSESSMENT

The SSC concluded that it was “unlikely but cannot be excluded” (**GBR II**) that domestic cattle in Costa Rica are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent.

## THE ANALYSIS

### EXTERNAL CHALLENGE

Costa Rica was exposed to a negligible external challenge from 1980 to 1990 and from 1996 to 2000. From 1991 to 1995, the country was exposed to a low external challenge due to the imports of MBM from BSE-Risk countries.

### STABILITY

On the basis of the available information it was concluded that the country’s BSE/cattle system was **extremely unstable** from 1980 until 2000 and **very unstable** since 2001 until today. This indicates that BSE infectivity, if imported, could have reached domestic cattle and could have been recycled and amplified.

### *Feeding*

Feeding MBM to cattle was legally possible and generally practiced until 2001. The available information on the control of the feed ban does not allow judging the efficiency of this recent feed ban and it is hence assumed that feeding was “**not OK**” until the end of 2000. Since 2001 it is considered as “**reasonably OK**”.

### *Rendering*

Rendering ruminant material is and was a common practice in Costa Rica. However, on-farm fallen stock is excluded from rendering. It is assumed that the processes used were and are not adequate for reducing BSE-infectivity, if present. Therefore rendering is “**not OK**” throughout the reference period.

### *SRM-removal*

No SRM ban is in place in Costa Rica and SRM are normally rendered. Therefore SRM removal was “**not OK**” throughout the reference period.

### *BSE surveillance*

On the basis of the available information it is concluded that until recently (1999) no formal-surveillance existed in Costa Rica and that it is highly unlikely that small numbers of BSE-cases, if present, could have been discovered. With the recent measures the surveillance is somewhat improved but still insufficient.

## CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR

From 1991 to 1995, the extremely unstable system of Costa Rica was exposed to a low external challenge due to the imports of live cattle and MBM from BSE-risk countries. This level of external challenge could have led to an internal challenge from 1995 onwards. It is concluded that it is unlikely but cannot be excluded that domestic cattle are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent.

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

As long as no external challenge occurs in the future, the GBR would most probably remain unchanged. However, in view of the extremely unstable system, any non negligible external challenge would lead to an increase of the GBR.

*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 Costa Rica 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.*

Costa Rica – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, April 2003							
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-1990: Negligible 1991-1995: Low 1996-2000: Negligible		1980-2000: Extremely unstable 2001-today: Very unstable				From 1991 to 1995, the extremely unstable system of Costa Rica was exposed to a low external challenge due to the imports of live cattle and MBM from BSE-risk countries. This level of external challenge could have led to an internal challenge from 1995 onwards.
GBR-Level	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	BSE surveillance	
II	UK: No imports according to the country import data and confirmed by Eurostat and other data.	UK: No imports according to the country import data and confirmed by Eurostat and other data.	<b>Not OK 1980-2000; reasonably OK since 2001</b>	<b>Not OK 1980 – today.</b>	<b>Not OK 1980 – today.</b>	BSE is notifiable since 2001.	<b>INTERNAL CHALLENGE</b>  It is unlikely but cannot be excluded that domestic cattle are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with BSE-agent
GBR-trend	<u>Other BSE risk countries:</u> No imports according to the country import data. 701 live cattle from BSE-risk countries (621 CZ, 45 H; 35 SP) according to Eurostat and other data	<u>Other BSE risk countries:</u> 79 tons of MBM according to the country import data from Spain and a small quantity from Denmark. 23,5 tons of MBM from Austria and 4.8 tons from the Netherlands according to Eurostat and other data	Feeding MBM to cattle was legally possible and generally practiced until 2001.  The available information on the control of the feed ban does not allow judging the efficiency of this recent feed ban.	Rendering of ruminant material is and was a common practice in Costa Rica.  Fallen stock is excluded from rendering.  It is assumed that the processes used were and are not adequate for reducing BSE-infectivity, if present.	No SRM ban is in place in Costa Rica and SRM are normally rendered.	Until recently (1999) no formal-surveillance existed in Costa Rica.  It is highly unlikely that small numbers of BSE-cases, if present, could have been discovered.  With the recent measures the surveillance is somewhat improved but still insufficient	