

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

adopted by the SSC on 10 April 2003

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

THE ANSWER

The BSE-agent may have reached the territory of Estonia before its independence in 1991. Since 1995 significant amounts of MBM were imported from BSE risk countries. A significant risk that BSE infectivity entered processing therefore exists since some years, at the latest since 2000, when domestic cattle potentially exposed to contaminated imported MBM around 1995, could have entered processing while approaching the end of the incubation period. Given the instability of the system, this could have led 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 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.

Estonia 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 Estonia.

THE RISK ASSESSMENT

The SSC concluded that it was “likely but not confirmed” (**GBR III**) that domestic cattle in Estonia 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 January 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 1980 to 2001, Estonia imported a total of 489 live cattle from BSE-risk countries, of which 61 were imported from the UK. Eurostat however does not report live cattle exports from UK to Estonia for this period but to the Soviet Union. This assessment takes into account the different aspects discussed in the report that allow to assume that certain imported cattle did not enter the domestic BSE/cattle system, i.e. were not rendered into feed.
- MBM imports: Over the period 1993-2001, Estonia imported 5,474 tons of MBM from BSE-risk countries, of which none came from the UK. According to the country dossier, 15 tons of MBM were imported from the UK.

STABILITY

No information was available on the BSE/cattle system on the territory of Estonia before 1991 but it is assumed that it was not more stable than in Estonia 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 feed ban of 2001 the system improved to very unstable and in 2003, with the amendment of the SRM-removal measures, it improved further to unstable.

Feeding

Feeding MBM to cattle was legally possible until February 2001, even though the information provided indicates that it was uncommon practice for dairy and beef cattle. Because there is no evidence provided that MBM was not fed to cattle, and in view of the late introduction of a MBM to ruminant feed ban (only in 2001), it is assumed that feeding was "**not OK**" from 1980-2000. Since 2001, feeding is regarded as "**reasonably OK**".

Rendering

Rendering is and was common practice in Estonia. The rendered material contains ruminant material, including SRM and fallen stock. The processes used before November 2000 were not adequate for reducing BSE-infectivity. It remains unclear, if, when and where the 133°C/20^{min}/3^{bar} standard has been applied since then. Therefore, rendering is regarded as "**not OK**" for the entire period 1980-2001.

SRM-removal

There was no SRM ban until the middle of 2001, SRM was included in the raw materials rendered and fallen stock might have been rendered, too. Therefore, SRM removal was “**not OK**” for the entire period 1980-2001. Since 2003, SRM removal is considered “**reasonably OK**” because the list of tissues and organs is now complete and could be considered “**OK**” if evidence were provided that it is well implemented.

BSE surveillance

Although an “active surveillance” programme was initiated in 2001, the low number of fallen stock examined indicates that the system is not working sufficiently. This therefore cannot improve the stability of the system throughout the entire period.

CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR

The BSE-agent may have reached the territory of Estonia before its independence in 1991. After 1995 significant amounts of MBM were imported from BSE risk countries. A significant risk that BSE infectivity entered processing therefore exists since some years, at the latest since 2000, when domestic cattle potentially exposed to contaminated imported MBM around 1995, 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 Estonia 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.

ESTONIA – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, April 2003							
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-1990: Significant 1991-1995: Moderate 1996-2000: High		1980-2000: Extremely unstable 2001-2002: Very unstable since 2003: Unstable				
GBR-Level	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	BSE surveillance	After the independence, significant MBM imports started in 1995 and met an extremely unstable system. From 2001-2002 the system is very unstable and since 2003 unstable, i.e. it still recycles BSE infectivity faster than it disappears from the system.
III	UK: 61 between 1985-1989 according to country import data and no cattle according to Eurostat and other export data.	UK: 15 tons according to country import data. According to Eurostat and other export data nothing.	Not OK 1980-2000, reasonably OK since 2001. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 33 % of all feedmills use MBM for the production of feed for monogastric animals and also for ruminants. A MBM to ruminant feed ban is in force since 2001. In 2002 more than 5% of the feed samples taken were contaminated with MBM. 	Not OK 1980-2001. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is claimed that rendering is carried out under adequate conditions (133°C, 3^{bar}, 20^{min}) but it is not clear since when. Since 2002, only low risk animal waste is rendered for feed. No evidence for appropriate application of these rendering conditions was provided. 	Not OK 1980-2000. reasonably OK since 2001 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SRM has to be removed since middle of 2001 but vertebral column is not considered SRM. SRM is not rendered since 2002. Since 2003 vertebral column is considered SRM. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BSE notifiable since October 1990. Rapid test used since middle 2001. Active surveillance in place since beginning of 2001. Mainly focused on risk populations In principle, from July 2003, the program should cover the same animal categories as in the EU. 	
GBR-trend	Other BSE risk countries: 489	Other BSE risk countries:	INTERNAL CHALLENGE				
increasing	according to the country import data. According to Eurostat and other export data, 419 from DK, NL, FR DE and FI.	According to country import data: 91-95: 324 t 96-2000: 4,688 t Total: 5,012 t According to Eurostat and other export data: 91-95: 258 t 96-2000: 5,216 t Total: 5,474 t <u>Comment:</u> Imports from UK: it is assumed that all MBM from UK was poultry MBM.	It is very likely that an internal challenge emerged in the territory of Estonia 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 Estonia is very likely to exist since 1995 mainly due to MBM imports.				