

Final report

on the assessment of the

Geographical BSE-Risk of

New Caledonia

6 March 2003

NOTE TO THE READER

Independent experts have produced this report, applying an innovative methodology by a complex process to data that were supplied by the responsible country authorities. Both, the methodology and the process, are described in detail in the final opinion of the SSC on "the Geographical Risk of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (GBR)", 6 July 2000 and its update of 11 January 2002. These opinions are available at the following Internet address:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/ssc/outcome_en.html>

This report, and the opinion of the SSC based on it, is now serving as the risk assessment required by the TSE-Regulation EU/999/2001 for the categorisation of countries with regard to their BSE-status. The final BSE-status categorisation depends also on other conditions as stipulated in annex II to that TSE-Regulation.

1. DATA

- The available information was sufficient to carry out the qualitative assessment of the GBR.

Sources of data

- Country dossier (CD) consisting of information provided from the country's authorities in 2002 and 2003.

Other sources:

- EUROSTAT data on export of "live bovine animals" and on "flour, meal and pellets of meat or offal, unfit for human consumption; greaves", covering the period 1980-2000.
- UK-export data (UK) on "live bovine animals" (1980-1996) and on "Mammalian Flours, Meals and Pellets", 1988-1996. As it was illegal to export mammalian meat meal, bone meal and MBM from UK since 27/03/1996, exports indicated after that date under customs code 230110 should only have included non-mammalian MBM.
- Export data from Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia and Switzerland.

2. EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

2.1 Import of cattle from BSE-Risk¹ countries

According to the country dossier since 1980 live cattle were only imported from New Zealand, Australia and Vanuatu.

Eurostat reports the export of three live cattle from France in 1995 to New Caledonia.

2.2 Import of MBM² or MBM-containing feedstuffs from BSE-Risk countries

According to the CD, since 1980, 80% of the imported MBM came from New Zealand, the balance from Australia, Vanuatu and (in 1988) from the USA.

Eurostat reports the export of two tons of MBM from France to New Caledonia in 1985.

Import bans please see under 3.1.

¹ BSE-Risk countries are all countries already assessed as GBR III or IV or with at least one confirmed domestic BSE case.

² For the purpose of the GBR assessment the abbreviation "MBM" refers to rendering products, in particular the commodities Meat and Bone Meal as such; Meat Meal; Bone Meal; and Greaves. With regard to imports it refers to the customs code 2301 10 "flours, meals and pellets, made from meat or offal, not fit for human consumption; greaves".

2.3 Overall assessment of the 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).

- Live cattle imports:

In total the country imported over the period 1980 to 2001 three live cattle (Eurostat and other data) from BSE-risk countries (France).

- MBM imports:

In total the country imported over the period 1980 to 2001 two tons of MBM (Eurostat and other data) from BSE-risk countries (France).

External Challenge experienced by NEW CALEDONIA				
<i>External challenge</i>		<i>Reason for this external challenge</i>		
Period	Overall Level	Cattle imports	MBM imports	Comment
1980–2001	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	

Table 1: External Challenge resulting from live cattle and/or MBM imports from the UK and other BSE-Risk countries. The Challenge level is determined according to the SSC-opinion on the GBR of July 2000 (as updated in 2002).

On the basis of the available information, the overall assessment of the external challenge is as given in the table above.

3. STABILITY

3.1 Overall appreciation of the ability to avoid recycling of BSE infectivity, should it enter processing

Feeding

- There are only two feed mills producing feed for cattle (130 tons per year), pigs and poultry in New Caledonia. Details are provided on the production and the composition of feed for all different species.
- Before the feed ban of February 1997, feed stuffs containing MBM were provided to dairy cattle (300 animals) and for cattle used in exhibitions or cattle for genetic improvement (60 animals).
- The majority of the cattle are for beef production and are under extensive grazing management (190.000 ha) and do not receive any supplements except for molasses in dry periods (last dry period was in 1994). Dairy cattle do regularly receive supplementary feed, which are specified in the CD and do not include animal protein.

Feed ban

- As from July 1996 import of MBM to New Caledonia was prohibited except for MBM from New Zealand or Australia and originating from animals born and raised in these countries.
- The use of mammalian MBM to feed ruminants was banned in February 1997 (Deliberation Nr. 133 CP).

Potential for cross-contamination and measures taken against

- The two feed mills produce cattle feed on the same production lines where they also produce pig and poultry feed.
- It is stated in the CD that the use of flushing batches is the common measure to prevent cross-contamination.
- The two feed mills use clearly labelled bags indicating the contents and the animal species the feed is destined for. In case of multi-species holdings this is said to be explicit enough. No controls are carried out on farm.

Control of Feed bans and cross-contamination

- Compliance of the feed ban is checked by unannounced on the spot, controls of the two feed mills by the official Veterinary Service (SIVAP). However, no information on the sampling strategy and the number of samples taken was provided.
- During the last inspection in October 2001, fragments of bones were detected in three samples from dairy cattle feed. The proportion was regarded as too small to be quantifiable. The examining laboratory (Nantes, France) concluded that it could not be excluded that these bone fragments were of mammalian origin. Corrective measures have been asked to the concerned feed mill, which established a new calendar of operation that is supervised by SIVAP.
- Since the analyses in 2001, no further analyses were carried out. The next control is programmed for 2003.
- To avoid cross-feeding non-ruminant feed is labelled (text provided) and farmers are informed accordingly.

Rendering

- Since 1980, only one rendering plant exists attached to a slaughterhouse where deer, porcine and bovine animals are slaughtered. This plant produces 350 tons of MBM per year from the slaughter offal, including SRM.
- The processing parameters (humid heat at 100°C/180 min/ 3 bars) do not fulfil the 133°C/20min/3bar standard.
- Data on official controls were not provided.

SRM and fallen stock

- There is no SRM ban.
- Fallen stock is not rendered but disposed of by burial or direct incineration.

Conclusion on the ability to avoid recycling

In light of the above-discussed information it is assumed that the BSE agent, should it have entered the territory of New Caledonia could have been recycled and potentially amplified.

3.2 Overall appreciation of the ability to identify BSE-cases and to eliminate animals at risk of being infected before they are processed

Cattle population structure

According to the CD, the total cattle population of New Caledonia is 125.000 animals of which 300 are dairy cattle in 4 herds.

In 1996 the age distribution was as follows:

- 66.7 % > 24 months
- 15 % between 12 and 24 months
- 18.3% < 12 months.

All cattle are identified on a herd basis by branding. Non-branded cattle can not be slaughtered. In 2001 a total of 16,410 cattle were slaughtered. The age distribution was as follows:

- 45.5 % > 24 months
- 8.2 % 6 - 24 months
- 46.3 % < 6 months

With reference to dairy cattle, on average 30 cows are slaughtered yearly.

BSE surveillance

BSE is officially notifiable since December 1998.

No information was provided on the number of brain samples examined for BSE. It is also not clear if ever any BSE suspect has been notified.

BSE-awareness training was provided to veterinarians in ante mortem inspection and written information was provided to practitioners.

An information campaign has started in order to stimulate farmers to notify the appearance of neurological signs. These animals will then be euthanised and examined for BSE. Compensation is foreseen in the framework of BSE eradication

Observation of cattle with nervous symptoms is rare and at every occasion a diagnosis has been made differently than BSE (BVD, post-partum related accidents, leptospirosis).

There is no specific BSE surveillance programme.

A BSE surveillance programme at slaughterhouses for bovines > 24 months will be initiated by 2003. Samples will be analysed in a laboratory in France (Cote d'Or). Given the small number of samples expected yearly (not more than 40) the creation of a National BSE laboratory is postponed.

It is concluded that the available passive surveillance would not be able to ensure detection of BSE cases occurring.

3.3 Overall assessment of the stability

For the overall assessment of the stability, the impact of the three main stability factors (feeding, rendering and SRM removal) and of the additional stability factor, surveillance, has to be estimated. Again, the guidance provided by the SSC in its opinion on the GBR of July 2000 (as updated in 2002) is applied.

Feeding

Until February 1997 dairy cattle received regularly supplementary feed that possibly contained MBM. Feeding was “**not OK**” until the end of 1997 and “**reasonably OK**” since 1998 because it seems unrealistic that the use of MBM in dairy cattle feed stopped immediately after introduction of the ban. After the installation of the feed ban cross-contamination remained possible.

Rendering

The rendering process applied in the only rendering plant of the country is not able to reduce BSE infectivity. Rendering is therefore regarded “**not OK**”.

SRM-removal

SRM is rendered as far as it is included in the animal waste from the slaughterhouse to which the rendering plant is attached. SRM-removal is therefore “**not OK**”.

Fallen stock and slaughterhouse waste from small slaughterhouses is not rendered but incinerated or buried.

BSE surveillance

The existing BSE surveillance is only passive (if existing at all) and mainly based on ante mortem inspection. It is not able to detect BSE.

Stability of the BSE/cattle system in <u>NEW CALEDONIA</u> over time					
Stability		Reasons			
Period	Level	Feeding	Rendering	SRM removal	BSE surveillance
1980 to 1997	Extremely unstable	Not OK	Not OK	Not OK	↓
1998-2002	Very unstable	Reasonably OK			

Table 2: Stability resulting from the interaction of the three main stability factors and the BSE surveillance. The stability level is determined according to the SSC-opinion on the GBR of July 2000 (as updated in 2002).

On the basis of the available information it is concluded that the BSE/cattle system of New Caledonia was extremely unstable until 1997 and very unstable thereafter.

This stability assessment indicates that the BSE agent, should it have been introduced into the country at any time during the last 20 years could have reached domestic cattle and would probably have been recycled and potentially amplified.

4. CONCLUSION ON THE RESULTING RISKS

4.1 Interaction of stability and challenges

In conclusion, the stability of the BSE/cattle system of New Caledonia in the past and the external challenges the system has coped with are summarised in the table below. From the interaction of the two parameters “stability” and “external challenge” a conclusion is drawn on the level of “internal challenge” that emerged and had to be met by the system, in addition to external challenges that occurred.

INTERACTION OF STABILITY AND EXTERNAL CHALLENGE IN NEW CALEDONIA			
Period	Stability	External Challenge	Internal challenge
1980-1997	Extremely Unstable	Negligible	Highly unlikely
1998-2002	Very Unstable		

Table 3: Internal challenge resulting from the interaction of the external challenge and stability. The internal challenge level is determined according to guidance given in the SSC-opinion on the GBR of July 2000 (as updated in 2002).

Any external challenges could have led to an internal challenge in New Caledonia. However, as almost no imports from BSE risk countries could be identified it is highly unlikely that an internal challenge ever occurred in New Caledonia.

4.2 Risk that BSE infectivity entered processing

- As only negligible external challenges could be identified, no processing risk ever occurred.

4.3 Risk that BSE infectivity was recycled and propagated

- As no processing risk ever occurred there was never a risk that the BSE agent was recycled and amplified, even in the light of the extremely or very unstable system.

5. CONCLUSION ON THE GEOGRAPHICAL BSE-RISK

5.1 The current GBR as function of the past stability and challenge

- The current geographical BSE-risk (GBR) level is *I*, *i.e. it is highly unlikely* that domestic cattle are (clinically or pre-clinically) infected with the BSE-agent.

5.2 The expected development of the GBR as a function of the past and present stability and challenge

- As long as no external challenge occurs the GBR will remain low as it is. However, given the low stability of the system any such external challenge could lead to the building up of an internal challenge.
- Assuming that New Caledonia can continue preventing the BSE-agent from entering the country, it will remain highly unlikely that cattle are (pre-clinically or clinically) infected with the BSE-agent.
- However, given the very unstable system, any undetected or accidental challenge could have very severe consequences, which would only become visible many years after such an accident.

5.3 Recommendations for influencing the future GBR

- Improving the stability by better controls of the feed ban, improved rendering and exclusion of SRM from rendering would make the system less vulnerable to authorised or non-authorised imports.
- Improved passive and active surveillance, *i.e.* sampling of animals not showing signs compatible with BSE from “at-risk” cattle populations, such as adult (>24 months) cattle in fallen stock and emergency slaughter, *e.g.* by means of rapid testing, would allow confirming absence of BSE from the territory of New Caledonia.