Opinion of the

Scientific Steering Committee

on the

GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (GBR) in

Latvia

Adopted by the SSC on 27 June 2002

Opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee on the GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (GBR) in Latvia – 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 up-to-date GBR of Latvia as assessed in June 2002.

THE ANSWER

The BSE-agent may have reached the territory of Latvia before its independence in 1991. After 1995 significant amounts of live-cattle and MBM were imported from BSE risk countries. A significant risk that BSE infectivity entered processing therefore exists since some years, at the latest since 1999, when domestic cows 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 new 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 aware that not all available information was confirmed by inspection missions as they were performed by the FVO in the Member States. It recommends that BSE-related aspects are continued to be 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 2001Regulation (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.
Latvia 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 Latvia.

THE RISK ASSESSMENT

The SSC concluded that it was "likely but not confirmed" **(GBR III)** that domestic cattle in Latvia 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: No data were available for the period before 1991. In total Latvia imported since 1991 about 17,500 cattle from BSE risk countries, mainly Lithuania. This would represent a significant external challenge but a large fraction of the imports were for immediate slaughter at rather young age. The imports between 1991 and 1995 therefore remained "negligible" and the external challenge resulting from cattle imports was "low" between 1996 and 2000.
- MBM imports: The country dossier only provided data for MBM imports since 1998, indicating 862 tons. Eurostat and other export data amount to 3.522 tons of "MBM" that were exported since 1992 to Latvia from BSE risk countries. This represents a high external challenge. This external challenge was moderate between 1991 to 1995 and high during 1996-2000.

STABILITY

No information was available on the BSE/cattle system on the territory of Latvia before 1991 but it is assumed that it was not more stable than in Latvia 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 neutrally stable. With the foreseen implementation of the SRM ban in 2003, the system should improve further.

Feeding

According to the country an MBM-to-ruminant feed ban existed since 1990 but no information on controls of this feed ban were made available. At the same about 50% of the feed mills in the country produced feed for ruminant as well as for non-ruminants, often in the same production lines. Feeding is therefore assessed as "**not OK**" until 2001. Since 1/4/2001 MBM is prohibited from being fed to any farmed animal, except fur animals, and some feed controls were carried out indicating compliance. Feeding is therefore considered **"OK"** since then.

Rendering

Since the mid 90s and due to the small capacity of the rendering facilities most of the animal waste was buried, not rendered. However, parts of the bovine material were rendered and the processes applied were said being batch pressure cooking in compliance with 133/20/3. No evidence of the appropriate application of these rendering conditions is provided and rendering is considered **"not OK"** throughout the reference period.

SRM-removal

SRM is rendered. Fallen stock was normally not rendered but buried, mainly because of the low capacity of the rendering industry but could well have been rendered. SRM-removal is therefore considered **"not OK"** throughout the reference period. A ban on SRM removal is foreseen for 1/1/2003.

BSE surveillance

The surveillance for BSE in Latvia has been improved in the last year. Since 1997 it went from a passive system to an active one. Nevertheless, the monitoring so far did not reach the numbers necessary for a statistically significant evaluation. This will probably be rectified by the surveillance in 2002.

CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR

The BSE-agent may have reached the territory of Latvia before its independence in 1991. After 1995 significant amounts of live-cattle and MBM were imported from BSE risk countries. A significant risk that BSE infectivity entered processing therefore exists since some years, at the latest since 1999, when domestic cows 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 new 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 stability remains as it is, the probability of cattle to be (pre-clinically or clinically) infected with the BSE-agent will remain stable, as long as no further 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 Latvia 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.

LATVIA – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, June 2002

	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-1990: Significant **1991-1995: Moderate** **1996-2000: High**		**1980-2000: Extremely unstable** **2001: Neutrally stable**				It is likely, that the BSE-agent could have entered the territory of Latvia via imports even before the independence. After the independence, significant cattle and MBM imports started in 1995 and met an extremely unstable system. Since 2001 this system is neutrally stable, i.e. it will not any more recycle BSE infectivity faster than it disappears from the system.
GBR-Level	***Live Cattle imports***	***MBM imports***	***Feeding***	***Rendering***	***SRM-removal***	***BSE surveillance***	
III	UK: No imports according to country import data and to other export data. Other BSE risk countries: 899 according to the country import data. According to other export data, 16,236 from DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, LT and NL.	UK: No imports according to country import data and to other export data. Other BSE risk countries: According to country import data: 91-95: 0 t 96-2000: 862 t Total: 862 t According to other export data: 91-95: 920 t 96-2000: 2,602 t Total: 3,522 t	**Not OK 1980-2000, OK since 2001.** • No information provided on control of the 1990 MBM-to-ruminant feed ban. • About 50% of the feed mills produced ruminant and non-ruminant feed, often in same production lines. • Since 1/4/2001 MBM prohibited from being fed to any farmed animal, except fur animals, and some feed controls carried out show compliance.	**Not OK 1980-2001.** • Since mid 90s, due to small capacity of rendering facilities most of animal waste buried, not rendered. • Parts of bovine material rendered and processes applied are said to be batch pressure cooking in compliance with 133/20/3. • No evidence of appropriate application of these rendering conditions provided.	**Not OK 1980-2001.** • SRM included into rendering. Fallen stock normally not rendered but buried, mainly because of low capacity of the rendering industry. • However, fallen stock could well be rendered. • Ban of SRM foreseen for 1/1/ 2003.	BSE since 25/08/1998 compulsory notifiable infectious disease. Surveillance for BSE in Latvia improved in the last years. Since 1997 it went from a passive system to an active one. Nevertheless, monitoring so far not reached the numbers necessary for a statistically significant evaluation. This probably is rectified by the surveillance in 2002.	**INTERNAL CHALLENGE** It is likely that an internal challenge emerged in the territory of Latvia already before 1991 and that it continued to exist and to grow, due to the extremely unstable system. The external challenge experienced by Latvia in the second half of the 90s fuelled that process, making the presence of an internal challenge even more likely since 1994/95.
GBR-trend							
constant							