

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

Adopted by the SSC on 13 September 2002

## **Opinion of the Scientific Steering Committee on the GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (GBR) in MALTA – September 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 Malta as assessed in September 2002.

### **THE ANSWER**

The stable BSE/cattle system (since 2001 very stable) of Malta was exposed to a high and very high external challenge since the early 80s (since 1996 low external challenge). It is therefore likely that the BSE agent was introduced into the country but due to the absence of any rendering activity not recycled and not amplified. In Malta it was likely that imported MBM reached cattle in the early 80s and probably less likely after 1990. It is therefore possible that domestic cattle were exposed to the BSE-agent in the early 80s and thereafter, as long as MBM was imported. It is therefore concluded that it is likely but not confirmed that one or several domestic cattle are (pre-clinically or 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.

Malta 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 Malta.

## THE RISK ASSESSMENT

For Malta, the SSC concluded that it is “likely but not confirmed” (**GBR III**) that one or several domestic cattle in Malta 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).

- Live cattle imports:

Between 1980 and 2000 the country imported 14,415 (CD) live cattle from BSE risk countries other than the UK, and also 220 cattle (Eurostat and other data) from the UK in 1981. Together these imports represent a **negligible external challenge** for the whole reference period. This assessment takes into account that no cattle and no cattle waste from slaughterhouses etc. could have been rendered. This implies that the BSE-agent, should it have been present in any of the imported cattle, could not have reached domestic cattle.

- MBM imports:

Between 1980 and 2000 the country imported 2,857 tons of MBM from BSE-risk countries other than the UK (CD) and 2,986 tons from the UK (Eurostat and other data). Together these imports represent a **very high challenge**. Broken down to 5-years periods the resulting external challenge was high from 1980-1985, very high from 1986-1990, high from 1991-1995 and low thereafter.

### STABILITY

On the basis of the available information it was concluded that the country’s BSE/cattle system was **stable** from **1980** to **2000** and is **very stable** since **2001**.

### *Feeding*

Until 1990 it was legally possible to feed MBM to cattle, when a ban to feed MBM to ruminants came into force. Therefore feeding is assessed as **"not OK"** until 1990. As no information on control of the 1990 MBM ban was provided, feeding remains **"not OK"** after 1990. Since January 2001, a total ban of animal proteins (other than fishmeal) for farmed animal feed exists. Again no information on controls was provided, therefore, feeding remains for the time being **“reasonably OK”**.

### *Rendering*

According to the country dossier, rendering is, and was never, practised in Malta. Rendering therefore is considered **“OK”** throughout the reference period.

### *SRM-removal*

SRM and fallen stock are buried. SRM removal is considered **“OK”** throughout the reference period.

**BSE surveillance**

Before 1990, the ability to detect BSE-cases was very low in Malta. Since 1990, BSE is compulsory notifiable but no suspects were ever notified. Since 2000, an “active” surveillance of asymptomatic cattle improved the ability to identify clinical BSE-cases.

**CONCLUSION ON THE CURRENT GBR**

The stable BSE/cattle system (since 2001 very stable) of Malta was exposed to a high and very high external challenge since the early 80s (since 1996 low external challenge). It is therefore likely that the BSE agent was introduced into the country but due to the absence of any rendering activity not recycled and not amplified. In Malta it was likely that imported MBM reached cattle in the early 80s and probably less likely after 1990. It is therefore possible that domestic cattle were exposed to the BSE-agent in the early 80s and thereafter, as long as MBM was imported. It is therefore concluded that it is likely but not confirmed that one or several domestic cattle are (pre-clinically or clinically) infected with the BSE-agent (**GBR III**).

**EXPECTED DEVELOPMENT OF THE GBR**

Given the fact that the external challenge resulting from MBM imports decreased significantly since 1996, and apparently terminated in 2001, the GBR should decrease rapidly.

*A table summarising the reasons for the current assessment is given in annex I to this opinion. A detailed report on the assessment of the GBR of Turkey 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 co-operation of the country's authorities.*

MALTA – Summary of the GBR-Assessment, September 2002																											
	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY				INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY																				
	1980-1985: High 1986-1990: Very high 1991-1995: High 1996-2000: Low		1980-2000: Stable Since 2001: Very stable				From 1980-2000 the stable system of Malta was exposed to external challenges resulting from MBM imports from BSE risk countries (due to the absence of rendering activities imported live cattle are not considered to pose an external challenge). It is therefore likely that the BSE agent entered Malta and reached domestic cattle especially from 1980-1995. However, recycling and amplification of the BSE-agent can be practically excluded. In 2001, the system became very stable.																				
GBR-Level	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	BSE surveillance																					
III	<p>UK: 0 according to country import data and 220 according to other export data. Very likely that these were never imported.</p> <p>Other BSE risk countries: 14,415 according to the country import data. According to other export data, 6,130 from CZ, FR, HU, IE, NL and PL</p> <p>According to CD mainly for fattening and slaughter at less than 24 months.</p> <p>Due to missing rendering activities imported cattle represent only a negligible external challenge.</p>	<p>UK: 1,047 tons according to country import data. According to other export data 2,986 tons.</p> <p>Other BSE risk countries: According to country import data:</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>80-85:</td><td>2,819 t</td></tr> <tr><td>86-90:</td><td>20 t</td></tr> <tr><td>91-95:</td><td>14 t</td></tr> <tr><td>96-2000:</td><td>4 t</td></tr> <tr><td>Total:</td><td>2,857 t</td></tr> </table> <p>According to other export data:</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>80-85:</td><td>644 t</td></tr> <tr><td>86-90:</td><td>167 t</td></tr> <tr><td>91-95:</td><td>1642 t</td></tr> <tr><td>96-2000:</td><td>186 t</td></tr> <tr><td>Total:</td><td>2,639 t</td></tr> </table>	80-85:	2,819 t	86-90:	20 t	91-95:	14 t	96-2000:	4 t	Total:	2,857 t	80-85:	644 t	86-90:	167 t	91-95:	1642 t	96-2000:	186 t	Total:	2,639 t	<p><b>Not OK: 1980-2000, Reasonably OK: since 2001.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feed ban in force since 1990,</li> <li>• Before feeding MBM to ruminants legally possible but according to country 99% fed to poultry.</li> <li>• Information provided on results of controls of feed ban but significance cannot fully be appreciated, as definition of a positive feed sample is not given.</li> </ul>	<p><b>OK: 1980-2001.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No rendering activities during whole reference period. All animal waste is buried in official landfill sites.</li> </ul>	<p><b>OK 1980-2001.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SRM is removed but not rendered. No legislation for removal existing so far.</li> <li>• SRM and fallen stock is buried in official landfill sites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to country data, BSE is notifiable since 1990.</li> <li>• Compensation provided since 1990.</li> <li>• Before 1990, the ability to detect BSE-cases was very low in Malta.</li> <li>• “Active” surveillance since 2000. This improved the ability to identify BSE-cases.</li> </ul>	
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GBR-trend	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INTERNAL CHALLENGE</b></p> <p>An internal challenge might have occurred and was growing in Malta in the eighties, when domestic cattle could have got access to imported contaminated MBM. In the early 90s it was still likely but not growing anymore. Since 1996 it should be decreasing because the import of MBM was clearly reduced.</p> <p>Due to the absence of any rendering activities the internal challenge fully depends on MBM imports.</p>																										
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