

# **Report of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare on Criteria for Definition of Geographical Areas in Australia which can be considered as Low Risk areas as regards Importation of Species susceptible to Bluetongue Virus (BTV) and Epizootic Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (EHDV) into the European Union adopted 21 October 1998**

## **Request for an Opinion**

The Scientific Committee has been requested to give an opinion on "geographical areas in Australia which can be considered as safe or low risk areas as regards the importation of species susceptible to bluetongue virus (BTV) and epizootic haemorrhagic disease virus (EHDV) to Member States of the European Union.

## **Bluetongue (BT) and Epizootic haemorrhagic disease (EHD)**

For details about the infections and for suggestion for a protocol for importation of ruminants from endemic areas, the Committee refers to the opinion of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare of 21 October 1998).

Transmission of these infections takes place by midges of the genus *Culicoides*. In Australia the most important vectors are *C. wadai*, *C. brevitarsis*, *C. fulvus*, and *C. actoni*. There is also the potential of other *Culicoides* vectors. The Southern-most boundary of these infections is determined by the presence of vector species, which in turn is dependent on temperature and the amount of rain (Muller, 1995).

## **Recommendations**

The Scientific Committee for Animal Health and Animal Welfare proposes the following steps in order to establish safe areas for export of live ruminants from Australia with regard to BTV and EHDV.

The final recommendations are based on consideration of published knowledge on BT and EHD, the situation in Australia up to 1993/94, on the current Office International des Epizooties (OIE) guidelines (Code and Manual), and on an assessment of the risks involved in importation of live animals.

## **Suggestions:**

Live ruminants, which have been born and reared in such areas, can be imported from safe areas of Australia (regarding bluetongue virus (BTV) and epizootic Haemorrhagic disease virus (EHDV)) under the following conditions:

- A. The data for evaluating the vector situation in Australia should be updated. The Committee only had data available on vector distribution in Australia up to the year 1993/94. New data should be made available.
- B. The infections should be compulsorily notifiable and there should be no clinical, serological or epidemiological evidence for BTV or EHDV infection in the areas during the previous 2 years. In this respect, the Committee recognises the importance of the system of disease notification and of the standard of veterinary services in the exporting country. It notes that, in accordance with Article 3 of Council Directive 72/462/EEC, this factor must be taken into account when authorising importations.
- C. Safe areas can be established as follows. The area should be vector-free based on a current survey carried out in the previous 12 months. Vaccination is not permitted in the area. The safe area has to have a distance of at least 150 kilometres from any vector-area and furthermore;

D. A random and representative serosurvey (The sero-diagnostic methods used should be competitive ELISA methods or AGID tests as specified in the "OIE Manual of Standards for Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines" using the appropriate BTV and EHDV group specific antigens. The competitive ELISA is generally regarded as being more sensitive than the AGID test and therefore its use is recommended. Confirmation of positive samples should be by neutralisation tests) should be performed every year in the area towards the end of the insect activity season on animals native to the area. Cattle are the animals of choice for the survey because they are more attractive to Culicoides and because some vector species breed only in cattle dung. However if few cattle are present or if their distribution in the area is not representative, then sheep should be selected instead of or in addition to the bovines. The serosurvey should detect infection with BTV or EHDV at a prevalence of 2% or more with 99% confidence. Any positive samples to the AGID test or ELISA should be retested with the neutralisation test. The reasons for any positive samples after the retest should be documented fully.

Ruminants from an area as established in D and recognised by the EU as a safe area regarding BTV and EHDV can be exported, provided that the animal is native to the safe area. During transport the animals must not pass through an infected area. In addition, animals for export from safe areas should be tested <sup>1</sup> individually and found negative for BT and EHD antibodies. Ruminants that are not native to the safe area will have to follow the rules for import from endemic areas, i.e., quarantine and testing.

## References

Muller, M.J.: Veterinary arbovirus vectors in Australia - A retrospective. *Vet.Microbiol.* 46:101-116, 1995.

Office International des Epizooties (OIE): International Animal Health Code, Special edition 1997. Pages 155-160

Office International des Epizooties (OIE): Manual of Standards for Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines, List A and B diseases of mammals, birds and bees, 1996. Pages 109-118

## Acknowledgements

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