

SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NOTE OF MEETING OF SEAC HELD ON 19 MARCH 1996 AT 5.00 PM AT THE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, RICHMOND HOUSE, LONDON SW1

Present:

Chairman:

Prof. J R Pattison (Chairman)

Members:

Dr R G Will (Deputy Chairman) - for part of the meeting

Prof. J Almond

Mr R Bradley - by telephone link to Paris

Prof. J Collinge - for part of the meeting

Dr R H Kimberlin - by telephone link to Paris

Prof. P Smith

Dr R Will

Observers:

Dr D Matthews (MAFF)

Dr A Wight (DH)

Secretariat:

Mr T Eddy (MAFF)

Mr M T Skinner (DH)

In attendance:

Sir K Calman (CMO, DH)

Mr K Meldrum (CVO, MAFF)

Dr R Kendell (CMO, Scottish Office)

Mr G Robb (DH)

Mr G Ross (MAFF)

Dr E Rubery (DH)

Mr J Wilesmith (MAFF)

Introduction by Chairman

1. The Chairman opened the meeting by explaining that the recent findings about a new form of CJD had been the subject of urgent discussion with the Prime Minister and senior Cabinet Ministers. The Government required SEAC's advice on the significance of the findings and recommendations for any action by early the next day for discussion by the Cabinet in preparation for Ministerial statements. The focus of the meeting would be on the adequacy of existing control measures to protect animal and public health and the need for any additional measures in the light of the new form of CJD. There would also need to be a comment about the risk to humans from eating beef and the safety of milk and dairy products. The statement could build on that already agreed following the SEAC meeting on 16 March.

2. The Committee agreed that any matters requiring detailed and extensive consideration in the light of further information, for example, in relation to sheep and mechanically recovered meat, would need to be dealt with at the meeting on 23 March.

Update on new form of CJD

3. Dr Will reported that a tenth case (a 20 year old) had now been confirmed by cerebral biopsy. The genetic information on 7 of the 10 cases would be available tomorrow. There was so far no evidence of genetic mutation. Professor Collinge commented that there was only a small possibility that the genetic sequencing would provide any information to change the view SEAC had reached at its meeting on 16 March.

Safety of milk and dairy products

4. The Committee was clear that there was no evidence that milk could act as a vehicle for BSE in cattle or other TSEs in other species. The Committee's advice would not therefore be changed by the recent findings of a new form of CJD.

Consideration of further measures

5. The Chairman reminded Members that SEAC had previously agreed the need to ban the use of mammalian meat and bonemeal in feed as a further measure to prevent potentially contaminated material from entering the food chain. The other main options for consideration as additional measures were to slaughter the entire UK beef herd and restock, slaughter all cattle over the age of 2½ years and deboning beef for human consumption meat from cattle over the age of 2½ years.

Slaughtering the entire UK beef herd

6. The Committee agreed that slaughtering the entire UK beef herd was not a justifiable course of action in the light of the scientific evidence. There was no evidence to suggest that BSE could be transmitted to humans via muscle and stringent measures were already in place in relation to the tissues which may contain infectivity. Such a recommendation would have far-reaching socio-economic implications and would have to be supported by stronger evidence than was already available. Professor Smith suggested that SEAC would have a better picture of the likelihood of there being a human epidemic caused by BSE in 6 months to a year's time. Dr Will agreed that any measures that the Committee recommended should reflect the lack of conclusive evidence that BSE was linked to the new form of CJD.

Slaughtering all cattle over the age of 2½ years

7. Mr Wilesmith provided the Committee with information which showed that from 1989 only 84 animals had a BSE onset date at 30 months or less. In the last two years there had only been 3 cases of BSE in cattle aged 30 months out of nearly 5 million cattle. The Committee agreed that 2½ would be an early enough cut-off point. With advice from committee members Professor Smith calculated that there could be a possible 500-fold reduction in risk if all cattle over the age of 2½ years were slaughtered taking into account the number of cattle affected with BSE at different ages.

- ~~the infectious dose in the cattle CNS experiments;~~
- ~~compared with the lack of detectable infectivity in spleen and lymph nodes which could be used as a proxy for the worst case with muscle tissue muscle;~~
- ~~the difference in efficiency of inoculation between the inter-cerebral and oral routes;~~