

PUBLIC SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE MEETING - 11 JANUARY 1999

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) met at the offices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Tolworth on 11 January 1999.

The Committee conducted its regular review of research findings and epidemiological information on BSE and vCJD.

The Committee noted that the total number of vCJD cases in the UK was 35. The number of cases of BSE continues to decline in line with predictions about the decay in the epidemic.

The Committee had been asked to consider the potential use of Pentosan Polysulphate as a prophylactic against vCJD. Dr. Stephen Dealler attended the Committee, made a presentation and took part in the discussion. Following this the Committee has provided advice to Ministers and a copy is attached.

The Committee had been asked by the Chief Medical Officer of England to consider the risk associated with cheek meat for human consumption removed in Northern Ireland from bovine heads imported from the Republic of Ireland. They noted that a decision of the courts in Northern Ireland meant that the importation of such bovine heads by one specific company for the removal of cheek meat for human consumption had now been permitted pending the outcome of an appeal against this decision to the European Court of Justice. The Committee considered that it would be preferable that cheek meat imported into the UK came only from animals from countries which have no cases of BSE and that bovine heads from which cheek meat was removed within the borders of the UK also came only from such countries. However SEAC recognised that imports are controlled by EU law. With respect to UK cattle over six months old the Committee reaffirmed its advice that the whole head, other than the tongue, should continue to be treated as specified risk material (SRM). The Chairman of the Committee has written to the Chief Medical Officer of England summarising these discussions and conclusions.

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The Committee considered a report from Det Norske Veritas (DNV) on the *"Assessment of the Risk of Exposure to vCJD Infectivity in Blood and Blood Products"*. The Committee agreed that because of the many uncertainties preparation of this Report had been a demanding task for DNV and it was difficult to draw any clear conclusions. The Report provided a great deal of useful background information on the sourcing, processing and use of human blood and blood products. The Committee welcomed the intention to publish the report and suggested one or two minor revisions. The Committee saw no reason to revise its earlier precautionary advice to Ministers recommending leucodepletion of blood destined for transfusion.

The Committee, in common with other food safety Advisory Committees, had been asked for its comments in relation to the proposal for an overall framework for the handling of risk analysis, risk management and risk communication across a range of food and food safety issues. The Committee had a preliminary discussion but decided to postpone further discussion until after the BSE Inquiry had reported so that its findings could be taken into account.