



## **ONE HUNDREDTH MEETING OF THE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee held its 100<sup>th</sup> meeting in London on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008, and discussed the following:

### **CURRENT ISSUES**

SEAC was informed about:

- Two recently identified cases of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) in Spain.
- Proposals for the future regulation of 'high street' dentistry outlined in a consultation issued recently by the Department of Health (DH)<sup>1</sup>. SEAC agreed to respond to the consultation, welcoming the proposals.
- The detection of material of unknown animal origin in a batch of wheat feed distributed for use in livestock feed<sup>2</sup>.

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE PREVALENCE OF SUBCLINICAL vCJD**

SEAC was updated about the progress of the National Anonymous Tonsil Archive (NATA) and of discussions around a proposed post mortem tissue archive. These would provide data to estimate the prevalence of subclinical vCJD (vCJD infections that have yet to develop, or may never develop, into clinical disease). Approximately 55 000 NATA samples had been screened by the end of March 2008. Although none was positive for abnormal prion protein (PrP<sup>vCJD</sup>), some testing remains to be done on some samples. SEAC expressed disappointment that it is currently

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<sup>1</sup> DH (2008) The future regulation of health and adult social care in England: A consultation on the framework for the registration of health and adult social care providers.

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH\\_083625](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH_083625)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/apr/feedcontam>

proving difficult to establish a post mortem tissue archive through collection of tissues from Coroners' autopsies.

In light of the current difficulties in establishing a post mortem tissue archive, DH asked for advice about how existing data from NATA might be combined with a completed survey of appendix samples<sup>3</sup>, which had found PrP<sup>vCJD</sup> in three out of about 11 000 samples. SEAC considered that the data from these studies are not, at the present time, discrepant. However, given the uncertainties about the tissue distribution of PrP<sup>vCJD</sup> during vCJD incubation, it would be hard to see how these data could be combined.

SEAC considered what further work might be done to obtain better estimates for the prevalence of subclinical vCJD including additional appendix studies and a post mortem tissue archive. SEAC strongly recommended that every avenue be pursued to establish such an archive.

The committee agreed to produce a statement.

## **UPDATE ON ANIMAL TSEs**

SEAC was updated on transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) in animals in the UK and elsewhere.

In the UK, the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) epidemic in cattle peaked in 1992, with over 37 000 confirmed cases but has since declined with 67 cases confirmed in 2007. By the end of 2007, there had been 178 BSE cases confirmed in the UK in cattle born after the introduction of the reinforced feed ban in 1996. Two unusual (H-type) BSE cases have been found in the UK. Relatively low numbers of BSE cases have also been found in the other European Union (EU) countries and elsewhere.

No TSEs have been found in a relatively small EU survey of deer.

There is no evidence for the presence of BSE from surveillance of UK sheep. Classical scrapie case numbers continue to decline in the UK with 31 cases confirmed in 2007. Small numbers of

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<sup>3</sup> Hilton *et al.* (2004) Prevalence of lymphoreticular prion protein accumulation in UK tissue samples. *J Pathol.* 203, 733-739.

atypical scrapie cases continue to be found with a total of 194 cases confirmed in the UK since surveillance for atypical scrapie began in 2002. Classical and atypical scrapie continue to be found in EU and other countries.

## **CONSIDERATION OF OPTIONS FOR RELAXATION OF THE TOTAL FEED BAN**

At SEAC 99, Rural Affairs Departments and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) asked SEAC to assess the possible consequences of various options for relaxing the total feed ban. These included the introduction of tolerance levels for certain types of processed animal protein (PAP) in feed, the inclusion of fish meal in young ruminant diets and the feeding of non-ruminant PAP to non-ruminants of a different species. Following that meeting, a draft statement was prepared based on the discussions.

SEAC discussed the draft statement and agreed modifications. Once the statement is finalised, it will be published on the SEAC website.

## **PROPOSALS TO REDUCE TESTING OF CATTLE SLAUGHTERED FOR FOOD – IMPACT ON RISK TO HUMAN HEALTH**

FSA asked SEAC to consider an analysis of the human health risk of a range of options for altering the BSE surveillance programme by increasing the minimum age at which healthy slaughtered and fallen stock cattle must be tested for BSE. A BSE risk model constructed by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, that had been previously reviewed and accepted by SEAC, was used for the analysis.

SEAC noted that the increased risks calculated by the model arising as a result of raising the age at which cattle are tested for BSE are very small. These calculations are subject to uncertainties, particularly in relation to assumptions made about infectivity in tissues and the BSE epidemic. The committee asked for further information about how well outputs from the model fit actual surveillance data. SEAC suggested that future modelling could examine the effect of changing controls on effectiveness of one control. SEAC noted that BSE testing of cattle provides

important data on the incidence of the disease and confers some public health protection.

## **HORIZON SCANNING**

SEAC considered issues that might emerge on the TSE science horizon. It noted that significant progress continues to be made to understand TSEs better and to develop effective TSE control policies. SEAC considered areas of TSE science important for the future could include the:

- nature of the TSE carrier state
- genetic factors that modulate susceptibility to TSEs
- molecular basis of TSE strains and the relationship with host genetics
- potential for animal TSEs to transmit to humans
- development of ante mortem diagnostic tests
- proportionality of TSE controls