



## **SEVENTY EIGHTH MEETING OF THE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) held its 78<sup>th</sup> meeting in London on 24 June 2003, when it discussed the following matters:

### **Risk Assessment on Ox Tongue and Associate Tonsil Tissue**

At an earlier meeting SEAC considered a new finding of BSE infectivity in bovine tonsil and its possible association with ox tongue. SEAC recommended that a risk assessment be conducted and this was commissioned by the Food Standards Agency, and presented at the June 2003 meeting. The risk assessment considered the possible range of human exposure to BSE infectivity from the consumption of ox tongue. The Committee concluded that it was not possible to advise the FSA precisely on the magnitude of the risk due to the substantial scientific uncertainty inherent in the risk assessment. However, the Committee agreed that the scientific evidence indicated that the potential risk of infectivity from eating tongue was likely to be very small. The Committee identified further scientific work that would help to refine the risk estimates.

### **Review of the use of MMBM in fertiliser**

The Department of the environment, food and rural affairs (Defra) asked SEAC to provide scientific advice on the animal health implications of proposed changes to UK fertiliser controls. SEAC agreed that the proposed use of ash from the incineration of meat and bone meal (MBM) derived from category 2 and category 3 material without restriction on land would not result in significant additional risk to animal health. SEAC confirmed its earlier advice that mammalian MBM should not be permitted in fertilisers likely to be spread on agricultural land or land where animals may graze.

## **VLA Survey – Scrapie Surveillance in Sheep**

The Committee noted the preliminary results of a report from the Veterinary Laboratories Agency estimating the prevalence of scrapie in the national flock. The Committee also noted that a full report would be available in due course, containing all of the data from the study.

## **vCJD Update**

The National CJD surveillance unit reported that 136 vCJD cases have been confirmed in the UK with 4 cases still alive. All vCJD cases tested to date are of the same genotype (Methionine homozygous at codon 129 of the PrP gene) All vCJD cases in 2003 reported the onset of clinical signs in 2002, but the total number of onsets in 2002 has yet to be confirmed.

## **Report from the SEAC Epidemiology sub-group**

The Chairman of this specialist sub-group reported to SEAC that there continues to be statistical evidence that the vCJD epidemic is no longer increasing at the rate seen previously and that the underlying incidence may have reached or be reaching a peak. However the possibility of susceptible genotypes other than methionine homozygotes and the theoretical possibility of other clinical manifestations of infection with the BSE agent other than vCJD means that prediction of the evolution of the epidemic is uncertain and continued surveillance is essential.

## **Expert Group on Strain Differentiation**

SEAC received a report from the Chairman of an expert group of the EU Community TSE Reference Laboratory Committee, which met on 23 June 2003 to review progress on a trial to evaluate rapid TSE tests.

## **Quinquennial Review of SEAC**

The Committee welcomed the recommendations outlined in the SEAC Quinquennial Review Report published in March 2003.