



## **NINETY FIFTH MEETING OF THE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee held its 95<sup>th</sup> meeting in London on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2006, and discussed the following:

### **CURRENT ISSUES**

SEAC was informed about the following issues:

- The Clinical Governance Advisory Group, convened to advise the Department of Health on appropriate arrangements and care for individuals 'at risk from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) for public health purposes', is finalising its report. The report is anticipated to be submitted to the Chief Medical Officers for consideration in December 2006.
- In November 2006, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) announced that a meat plant was recalling a number of meat products after finding that due to a human error a 54 month old cow was wrongly identified as being less than 30 months old. All cattle aged over 30 months must be tested for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and found to be negative before they can enter the food chain. Further information is available on the FSA website<sup>1</sup>.

### **ATYPICAL SCRAPIE UPDATE**

SEAC was updated on a case of atypical scrapie in a sheep flock used for research purposes. This flock was considered to be free of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) as the founder animals of the flock were from New Zealand, a country considered free of TSEs. The diagnosis had been independently

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2006/dec/boardlondondec06>

confirmed and genetic analysis showed the animal to be of a genotype considered most susceptible to atypical scrapie. An investigation of the case and an independent audit of the processes used to manage the flock had been conducted and would report soon. Investigations of the flocks of origin of the founder animals, other animals in the flock and animals from the flock that had been supplied to other research facilities are ongoing.

## **REPORT FROM THE SEAC SHEEP SUBGROUP**

SEAC was invited to comment on a statement from the SEAC Sheep Subgroup on the science underpinning the Ram Genotyping and Welsh Ewe Genotyping Schemes. The Subgroup had concluded that the prevalence of BSE in the UK sheep population is most likely to be zero, or very low if present at all. Consequently, any impact of the schemes on human health from removing BSE from sheep is likely to be negligible. The effect of the schemes on the prevalence of atypical scrapie is unclear but they would remove a large proportion of classical scrapie infections. SEAC endorsed the statement and suggested some minor changes. It will shortly be posted on the SEAC website.

## **SRM CONTROLS AT ABATTOIRS AND CUTTING PLANTS**

FSA asked SEAC to assess the suitability of a mathematical model to estimate potential exposure of the UK population to BSE after cattle carcasses had been processed in abattoirs and cutting plants.

SEAC was content with the methodology but noted that many of the assumptions used in the model were based on expert opinion rather than data. The committee considered it important to obtain data to inform key assumptions made and suggested a number of refinements to the model. In models of this nature, it would be useful to not only consider usual events, but also rare or unexpected events, that could potentially give rise to large health risks to provide information on how such events may be prevented.

## **WORKING GROUP ON A POST MORTEM TISSUE ARCHIVE**

A working group convened by the Health Protection Agency, in response to a recommendation from SEAC<sup>2</sup>, was considering the feasibility of collecting tissues from coroners' autopsies to estimate the prevalence, age and genotype distribution of subclinical vCJD in the UK. A strategy and protocol are under development for the collection of spleen, and possibly brain, that would be evaluated in a pilot study with a small number coroners in early 2007. SEAC noted that a post mortem tissue archive was critically dependent on the support of coroners offices and development of the archive should be strongly encouraged and supported.

## **REPORT FROM THE SEAC EPIDEMIOLOGY SUBGROUP**

SEAC welcomed an updated SEAC Epidemiology Subgroup statement on the vCJD epidemic. The committee noted the Subgroup's recommendation that testing samples collected by the National Anonymous Tonsil Archive, together with the proposed post mortem tissue archive, currently provides the best route to estimating the prevalence, genotype and age distribution of subclinical vCJD. This remains a high priority. Some minor changes to the statement were suggested.

## **BSE RISK MODEL**

The FSA and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs asked SEAC to comment on a preliminary mathematical model to estimate human exposure to BSE arising from potential changes to BSE control measures in Great Britain. The item was discussed in a reserved business session in accordance with the SEAC Code of Practice as it involved consideration of unpublished work.

SEAC generally accepted the methodology and data used and made suggestions for refinements to the model. It was noted that the model could be updated as new data becomes available. Once further refined, the model would provide a very useful tool to analyse the effect of potential changes to BSE controls.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.seac.gov.uk/statements/state260106.htm>