

BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (BSE): REQUIREMENTS FOR THE IMPORTATION OF BEEF AND BEEF PRODUCTS FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION – EFFECTIVE 1 MARCH 2010

Purpose

To describe the requirements to safeguard the Australian population against exposure to the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) agent via imported *beef or beef products*. These requirements apply to beef and beef products for human consumption and are in addition to existing sanitary measures.

Summary

The requirements in relation to BSE developed to ensure that imported *beef or beef products* available on the Australian domestic market are safe for human consumption have been updated in response to the changing BSE situation worldwide. Current scientific evidence indicates that the BSE epidemic in cattle peaked in 1992 and that measures to reduce the risk of human exposure to the BSE agent through the food chain have been effective.¹

The new requirements for consignments from other countries have been developed considering current scientific knowledge and are proportionate to the assessed BSE risk of each country². The assessment of the BSE risk of a particular country involves an analysis of information supplied to Australia on potential factors for BSE occurrence, BSE surveillance and monitoring systems and the BSE history including the implementation of control measures.³

Current scientific evidence indicates that there would be a negligible risk of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in the Australian population as a result of the future consumption of beef and beef products imported from countries which have reported cases of BSE in cattle, provided they demonstrate effective implementation of, and compliance with, control measures designed to ensure beef and beef food products are free of the BSE agent.

In simple terms this means that the importation of beef and beef products from countries with reported cases of BSE will only be permitted if they meet the requirements outlined in the following section.

¹ These measures control the spread of BSE in cattle and prevent entry of the BSE agent into the human food chain.

² **Country** includes zone or compartment of a country where these are able to be recognised for this disease.

³ **The detail** of the Australian BSE Food Safety Assessment Process describes the assessment procedures including communicating requirements to applicant countries.

The following products for human consumption are exempt from these requirements⁴:

- collagen from bovine skins and hides (including sausage casings produced from this type of collagen)
- a minor ingredient⁵ of a processed product, where that ingredient comprises –
 - bovine fat, and/or
 - bovine tallow
- gelatine sourced from bovine skins and hides, and
- dairy products sourced from bovines.

Assessment of Countries

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has developed a risk assessment methodology to determine the BSE risk status of a cattle population of a country, and this is an appropriate mechanism for assessing whether the beef and beef products from a country represent a risk to the health of Australian consumers. The Australian BSE Food Safety Assessment Committee, chaired by Food Standards Australia New Zealand⁶ (FSANZ), will use the OIE methodology to undertake a risk assessment analysing information provided by the applicant country and any other relevant information, including any prior categorisation by the OIE. Applications for assessment must be accompanied by information equivalent to that required by the OIE for risk assessment, including details identifying all potential factors for BSE occurrence and their historic perspective. The risk assessment of a country by the committee may also include an 'in-country inspection', led by Australian officials, which will be based on defined criteria and include the specific elements to be considered in the inspection. For example, the inspection may include examining:

- the existing systems in the applicant country to prevent the spread of BSE in the cattle population and from entering the human food chain;
- the existing systems to prevent food for human consumption from becoming contaminated during animal slaughter and processing; and
- any other relevant matter.

Evidence obtained during the in-country inspection will be provided to the Australian BSE Food Safety Assessment Committee to assist in completing its risk assessment.

The outcome of the risk assessment will inform whether the beef and beef products from a country represent a risk to the health of Australian consumers and what import conditions would need to be imposed by Australia before beef and beef products could be imported. In a practical sense, imports will only be permitted from countries which are assessed as being:

Category 1 - There is a minimal likelihood that the BSE agent has or will become established in the national herd from that country and enter the human food chain. Beef and beef products derived from animals from these countries are therefore regarded as posing a minimal risk to human health; or

⁴ The products exempt from the certification requirements are listed in Standard 2.2.1 of the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* obtained from Food Standards Australia New Zealand website: <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au>.

⁵ minor ingredient means an ingredient that comprises no more than 300 g/kg of the food.

⁶ The Australian BSE Food Safety Committee, is chaired by FSANZ and includes an animal health expert from Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry and food safety and risk assessment experts from FSANZ.

Category 2- These countries have either not reported cases of BSE, but there are identified risk factors, or they have reported BSE but pose a minimal level of risk through effective implementation of, and compliance with, appropriate BSE control measures. The risk of beef and beef products potentially containing the BSE agent is mitigated through more stringent certification requirements to reflect this level of risk.

Beef and beef products from countries that have not applied to Australia for assessment or cannot demonstrate through the risk assessment effective implementation of, and compliance with, appropriate measures to control the BSE risk are considered to pose the highest level of risk and Australia will not import products from these countries.

The FSANZ CEO provides the final BSE risk assessment⁷ advice to the Deputy Secretary of Biosecurity Services Group (BSG) of DAFF who implements the relevant requirements.

Requests for assessments will be prioritised by the Australian BSE Food Safety Assessment Committee.

Countries can request a review of their assessment. The review of the assessment could comprise a number of actions including assessment of additional data or an 'in-country inspection' by Australian officials of that country's systems. Australia can also initiate a review of the assessed category of a country status if there is an indication that the BSE risks may have significantly changed. Countries will be required to submit surveillance results and information on feed controls and changes to the epidemiological situation for the preceding calendar year by 31 January each year for review by the Australian BSE Food Safety Assessment Committee.

Transitional Arrangements

Interim arrangements will be applied until 30 June 2011 for countries that can currently export beef and beef products to Australia.

Countries currently eligible to export beef and beef products to Australia:

Until 30 June 2011, countries that can currently export beef and beef products under the 2001 policy on BSE and imported food safety may continue trading beef and beef products under the existing arrangements until the Australian BSE Food Safety Assessment Committee undertakes re-assessment. *Beef or beef products* may continue to be imported into Australia from these countries after 30 June 2011 if an application for assessment as *Category 1* or *Category 2* has been submitted to the Australian BSE Food Safety Assessment Committee and provided no new BSE-risk factors are reported by the country during this period.

Countries that cannot currently export beef and beef products to Australia:

Countries that currently cannot export beef to Australia will only be able to trade *beef or beef products* after the Australian BSE Food Safety Assessment Committee has completed a risk assessment and concluded the risk is *Category 1* or *Category 2*.

⁷ The CEO of FSANZ approves the final assessment report including the BSE risk level.

Definitions

Country, category

The three country categories are described below. Countries in the *Category 1* are assessed at posing the least risk, whereas countries in the *Category 3* are assessed as posing the greatest risk.

Category 1

Countries assessed by Australia as meeting the 'Negligible BSE Risk' requirements of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Beef and beef products can be imported subject to specific requirements.

Category 2

Countries assessed by Australia as meeting the 'Controlled BSE Risk' requirements of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Beef and beef products can be imported subject to specific requirements.

Category 3 Countries assessed by Australia that do not meet the requirements of either Category 1 or Category 2, or countries that have not applied to be assessed by Australia. Beef and beef products cannot be imported.

Beef and beef products included in these categories are those products not specifically exempt from the requirements of the Australian policy.

Beef or beef food products (Beef and Beef Products)

Products intended for human consumption which contain bovine tissue (including cattle, buffalo and bison). This includes meat, bone and offal but excludes milk, dairy products, gelatine and collagen derived from bovine skins and hides, edible bovine fats and bovine tallows included as a minor ingredient of a processed product.

BSE risk materials

BSE risk materials are tonsils and distal ileum from bovine animals of any age; brains, eyes, spinal cord, skull and vertebral column of bovine animals over 30 months of age.

Mechanically separated meat

Meat produced from meat recovery systems using meat/bone separation machines. The process involves the comminuting, grinding or pulverising of bones to retrieve attached muscle portions. It is very fine texture and is the residue of meat removed from these bones after the boning operation.

Competent National Government Authority

That Authority recognized by Australia that can certify compliance with animal health and sanitary measures contained in these certification requirements. This would usually (but not always) be the national government veterinary administration.

Certification

Official certificates will only be considered by Australian authorities if supplied by the agreed *Competent National Government Authority* in each country.

Certificates must be in the form and manner of the wording agreed between Australia and the exporting country and may be issued retrospectively.

Certificates should have the following attestations.

1. *Category 1 countries*

The *beef or beef food product* is derived from bovine animals⁸ that have been born, raised and slaughtered in *Category 1* countries and that passed ante-mortem and post-mortem veterinary inspection under official veterinary supervision.

The *beef or beef food product* is considered to be fit for human consumption.

OR

2. *Category 2 countries*

The *beef or beef food product* is derived from bovine animals that:

- have been born, raised and slaughtered in *Category 1* or *Category 2* countries and that passed ante-mortem and post-mortem veterinary inspection under official veterinary supervision
- were not subjected to a stunning process, prior to *slaughter*, with a device injecting compressed air or gas into the cranial cavity, or to a pithing process

The beef and/or beef product were produced and handled in a manner, under official veterinary supervision, which ensures that they do not contain, and are not contaminated with:

- *BSE risk materials* or
- mechanically separated meat from the skull and vertebral column from cattle over 30 months of age.

The *beef or beef food product* is considered to be fit for human consumption.

Implementation of requirements

Upon advice from FSANZ CEO of a country's BSE risk assessment to the deputy Secretary of BSG of DAFF, the relevant certification requirements for that country's BSE risk assessment are implemented through the *Imported Food Control Act 1992* and its subordinate legislation the *Imported Food Control Regulations 1993*.

⁸ Note, where the product includes *beef and/or beef products* derived from bovine animals from countries with differing BSE status, the product will be required to be certified in accordance with the requirements for the country or zone with the highest risk.