



final report

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Australia's Preparedness Against Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

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Australia's Preparedness Against Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

The Australian red meat industry, in partnership with the Australian government and state governments (the SAFEMEAT partnership) has implemented a number of BSE controls and surveillance activities. Australia's BSE status has been evaluated by a number of countries and has been found to be very satisfactory.

Given the detection of BSE in North America, SAFEMEAT has reviewed controls for BSE and continues to develop plans to be better prepared for the possibility of a case in Australia or a case vCJD.

However, our objective is to ensure that risks are adequately communicated to the public prior to any situation that may heighten public concern. The public release of the report will ensure that there is an appropriate balance of information available for the public to form their own opinion on risks.

In that respect, the role of credible 'spokespersons' will be critical in communicating to the public and stakeholders not only at the conclusion to the research report but also in case of a public health crises.

We view the primary task to be a review of Australia's BSE status and preparedness which will assist in the development of a risk communications program. Integral to this is the role of the panel in assisting communicating some of the findings to the public and stakeholders.

Objectives:

- summarise the current state of scientific knowledge, risk reduction and preparedness measures associated with BSE and vCJD, in particular, those factors that may affect consumer confidence.
- examine 'lessons learned' from overseas BSE risk communication activities.
- provide an initially confidential report to MLA, suitable for industry consultation, addressing BSE risk communication strategies and messages.
- review the report with MLA, peak industry bodies and communications consultants.

The panel was composed of:

Professor Colin Masters (Chair) – Laureate Professor, Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, The University of Melbourne.

Emeritus Professor Mal Nairn – Board Chair, Australian Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre for Emerging Infectious Diseases.

Professor Colin Wilks (Secretary) – Professorial Fellow, Department of Veterinary Science, The University of Melbourne.

Australia's BSE status has been evaluated by a number of countries and the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) and each time Australia has been allocated most favourable status. This status depends on a number of factors, some of which are historical while others relate to the risk reduction measures in place, the surveillance and auditing that is undertaken, and the quality of laboratory services to perform tests to detect a case of BSE should it arise.

Overall the panel is of the view that Australia's preparedness against BSE, including surveillance, feed controls, laboratory capability and communication strategies are commendable. However a number of areas have been identified where these measures could be enhanced.