

Agriculture and Rural Development Committee

Inquiry into the ban on bone-in beef

Final Report

The interim report

1. On 21 July 1999 the Committee published an interim report on its inquiry into the ban on bone-in beef containing its assessment of the arguments for and against lifting the ban.

2. The Committee attached weight to the medical advice received and to concerns expressed by some farmers' representatives that the ban should not be lifted against scientific and medical advice. A majority of Committee members voted in favour of the following resolution:

i) to ensure that it has examined all the evidence, the Committee intends to wait until the Chief Medical Officer for Wales makes a statement on the public health implications of lifting the ban in order to make its recommendation to the Assembly;

ii) the Committee will meet as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter to agree on its recommendations to the Assembly.

Developments after the interim report

3. Following publication of the interim report, the Committee considered further statements from the Chief Medical Officers for England, Wales and Scotland. All three continued to agree that the ban on the use of beef bones in food manufacture should continue.

4. Until the end of November the Chief Medical Officers for Wales and Scotland also considered the risk to public health from lifting the ban on retail sales to be unacceptable. They felt it was necessary to see further evidence before making any recommendation to lift the ban. The Chief Medical Officer for Wales confirmed this as her view in oral evidence to the Committee on 13 October.

5. The view of the Chief Medical Officer for England on the impact of lifting the retail sales ban at that time was different from his colleagues in Wales and Scotland. In advice given in July, the Chief Medical Officer for England recommended that *'a decision to lift the bone-in beef ban should in my assessment be informed by the fact that the additional risk to human health created would at this stage of the cattle epidemic be tiny and unquantifiable in any meaningful way'*

6. When the Committee published its interim report it understood there to be unanimity of view between all UK Chief Medical Officers. With the publication, in September, of advice given by the Chief Medical Officer for England at the end of July, the Committee became aware that his view on the

implication of a partial lifting of the ban was then different.

7. After publishing its interim report, the Committee also saw correspondence between the Chair and Professor Roy Anderson, head of the Oxford Group. The Oxford Group research - modelling the extent of BSE in the herd – is a key component of the evidence referred to in paragraph 4 above, upon which the Chief Medical Officers base their advice. Professor Anderson's personal opinion was that the ban could be lifted immediately.

8. The Chief Medical Officer for Wales appeared before the Health and Social Services Committee on 18 November when she confirmed that the latest evidence would be available before the end of November and would be examined immediately by the four Chief Medical Officers.

9. On 1 December the Committee received further oral evidence from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales along with a joint written statement from all four UK Chief Medical Officers. Having then seen the most recent Oxford research and having discussed its implications with the other Chief Medical Officers, the Chief Medical for Wales felt that the ban could be lifted for retail sales.

Conclusion

10. Having considered all the evidence presented to it since the beginning of its inquiry, the Committee agreed that it should recommend a lifting of the ban on retail sales whilst maintaining the ban on use in manufacturing.

Resolution

At its meeting on 1 December 1999 the Committee voted unanimously in favour of the following motion:

Further to the motion agreed by the Committee on the 21st July 1999, the Committee, having considered all the evidence now presented to it, resolves to recommend to the National Assembly that the ban on beef on the bone should be lifted other than for use in manufacturing food products (including infant foods) and calls on the Assembly Cabinet to introduce a regulation to give effect to this resolution.

11. A list of the information received by the Committee after publication of the interim report is given in Annex A.

Evidence received since publication of the interim report

21 September - the Committee received further [written advice](#) from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales. This followed a [statement](#) by the Agriculture Minister, Nick Brown, in which he referred to the most recent advice he had received from the Chief Medical Officer for England.

13 October - the Committee considered:

- the most recent statements of advice from the Chief Medical Officers for [England](#), [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#);
- the [evidence](#) of the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland to the Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs Committee.
- the most recent available [statistics](#) on BSE and vCJD
- further oral [evidence](#) from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales.

27 October - the Chair of the Committee [wrote](#) to Professor Anderson, the head of the Oxford Group.

2 November - Professor Anderson [replied](#) to the Chair of the Committee.

1 December - the Committee received further [oral evidence](#) from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales and a written statement from the four UK Chief Medical Officers (annex B). The Committee also considered the Chief Medical Officer for Wales' [statement](#) to the Health and Social Services Committee, the [minutes](#) of the subsequent discussion and the most recent available [statistics](#) on BSE and vCJD.

Joint statement by the United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers of 30 November 1999

The Chief Medical Officers of each of the four United Kingdom countries have received the latest predictions on the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) epidemic in cattle produced by the

Wellcome Trust Centre for the Epidemiology of Infectious Disease at the University of Oxford.

Over the past six months they have reviewed the position of the bone in beef ban in the light of surveillance of the variant Creutzfeldt Jakob (vCJD) incidence in the human population, trends in the BSE epidemic in cattle (including the latest estimates from the Oxford group), and audits of the control measures which are in place to exclude potentially infected BSE material entering the human food chain.

They are reassured by the continuing decline of the BSE epidemic in cattle. In particular the latest Oxford estimate that the number of BSE infected cattle under 30 months which could enter the human food chain within 12 months of clinical infection is now estimated as only 1.2 cattle across Great Britain as a whole in the year 2000 (with a margin of error on this estimate of 0 to 4 cattle).

On the basis of their discussions and this analysis they have concluded that:

These circumstances would allow the beef on the bone ban to be lifted for retail sales, whilst allowing consumer choice.

In the light of continuing uncertainty about the infectivity of bone marrow (where further experiments are ongoing), the retention of the ban on the use of bones for manufactured and processed products would be prudent.

It is important to retain and rigorously enforce other control measures for protecting the human food chain from cattle over 30 months infected with BSE.

The human vCJD epidemic should continue to be monitored very closely.

New research evidence in relation to any aspect of animal or human transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) should be reviewed as soon as it is available.

Sir David Carter, Chief Medical Officer Scotland

Dr Ruth Hall, Chief Medical Officer Wales

Dr Henrietta Campbell, Chief Medical Officer Northern Ireland

Professor Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer England

30 November 1999