

## **Consumption of beef tongue:**

### **Human BSE risk associated with exposure to lymphoid tissue in bovine tongue in consideration of new research findings**

#### **Scientific Opinion of the Panel on Biological Hazards**

**(Question No EFSA-Q-2007-110)**

**Adopted on 17 April 2008**

#### **SUMMARY**

Following a request from the European Commission, the Panel on Biological Hazards (BIOHAZ) was asked to deliver a scientific opinion on the human BSE risk associated with exposure to lymphoid tissue in bovine tongue in consideration of the findings included in a scientific article recently published on the consumption of beef tongue and the risk for public health.

This scientific article describes the distribution of lymphoid tissue in bovine tongue and the location of bovine lingual tonsil. In addition, it concludes that the method currently prescribed for harvesting bovine tongues in slaughterhouses is not appropriate for removing all specified risk material (SRM) and proposes an alternative harvesting method.

EFSA was requested (i) to evaluate the design of the study and its scientific validity in relation to the distribution of lymphoid tissue in bovine tongue and (ii) to evaluate the conclusions and recommendations of the study in relation to BSE risk from bovine tonsil following the harvesting method currently prescribed by EU legislation compared to the alternative one proposed in the study.

The BIOHAZ Panel reviewed the scientific article and concluded that the study further confirms and extends observations that the lingual tonsil at the base of the tongue may not be entirely eliminated when harvesting tongues by means of the method currently prescribed.

In reply to the second request, the BIOHAZ Panel assessed different parameters in order to quantify the human exposure risk to BSE from bovine tonsil associated with the consumption of bovine tongue. It was concluded that, overall, the level of infectivity in bovine tonsil is low. This, together with the declining and overall low BSE prevalence and the current policy on SRM removal, suggests a very low, if not negligible, human BSE exposure risk associated with exposure to lymphoid tissue in bovine tongue harvested as currently prescribed by EU legislation. The BIOHAZ Panel further concluded that currently there are not sufficient quantitative data available allowing a comparison of the human BSE exposure risk reduction achieved by the alternative tongue harvesting method proposed by the study in comparison to the harvesting method currently prescribed. However, it is likely that the proposed method

would only provide a marginal reduction in the risk from bovine tonsil compared to the one currently prescribed.

Following to this, the BIOHAZ Panel made a series of recommendations on the topics that might be addressed in future studies on the subject.

**Key words:** BSE, beef tongue, tonsil, lymphoid tissue.