TSEs in Europe - Risk Assessment, Management and Control

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Introduction

Mathematical models and risk assessments have been used as a basis for TSE risk management and control options and much of the legislation regarding the control and eradication of TSEs within the European Union (EU). The NeuroPrion Risk Group (European Commission FP6) consists of 8 risk assessment experts representing 8 different European Institutions. These experts have collaborated with the goal of assessing current trends in TSEs across Europe while facilitating an exchange of knowledge and data between research groups on risk management and control of TSEs in addition to establishing a world-wide reference network on the risk assessment of TSE diseases.

Current Trends in BSE

There is currently a downward trend in prevalence of BSE across Europe (Figure 1) indicating the effectiveness of control strategies adopted throughout the European Union (EU). There is no reason why this positive trend should not continue. Most European countries have implemented measures to control BSE and have extensive surveillance systems. On a risk based assessment it might be suitable to relax some control measures concerning TSEs as outlined in European Commission's TSE roadmap[1]. However, such changes need to be reviewed in the context of new scientific evidence and communication of the effects of proposed changes on the risks to the public.

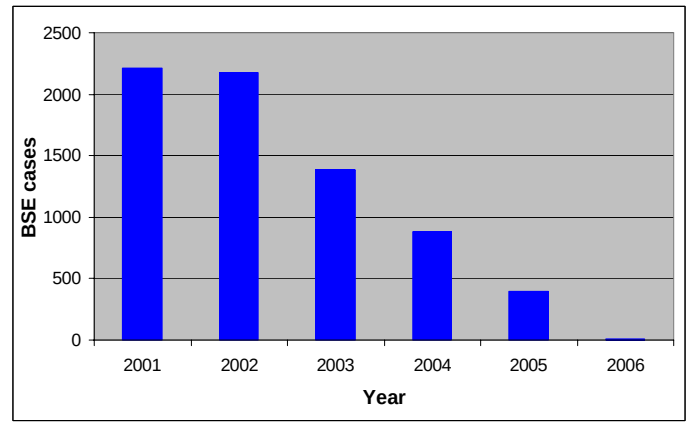

Figure 1: Total BSE cases in Europe from 2001 to 2006 (Data until 17/02/06)

NeuroPrion Risk

The NeuroPrion Risk group has peer reviewed relevant data and risk assessment models used across Europe, ensuring comparisons between countries are justified and generating a consensus on risk assessment procedures for TSE risk assessment[2,3]. Adherence to the Codex Risk Analysis Framework (Figure 2) for effective risk management and transparency for all stakeholders has been highlighted. Maintenance of risk management procedures and improved risk communication is vital to ensure consumer confidence across Europe with regard to food safety. The Neuroprion Risk network will facilitate this communication exchange by increasing visibility beyond the scientific community with regard to TSE risk analysis.

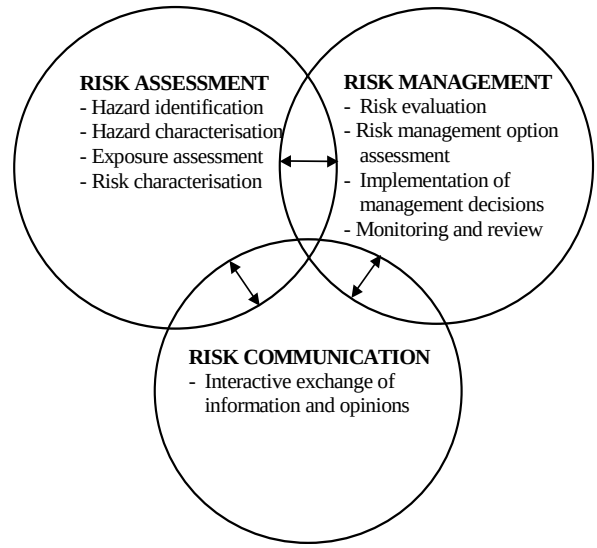

Figure 2: Risk Analysis Framework

Conclusions

The NeuroPrion Risk Groups work highlights the need for an exchange of knowledge and data between countries and the importance of collaboration between international scientists. The role risk assessment plays in the control of BSE has been highlighted resulting in a favourable trend in the BSE prevalence across Europe. Not withstanding this, any proposed relaxation in control measures needs to be looked at in context food safety and risk communication for all stakeholders. Any relaxation should be risk based and carried out in accordance with a risk analysis framework. New measures should be in line with current technology and new evolving scientific knowledge.

Acknowledgements

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References

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