



Ref: VITT1200/BT-SP

BLUETONGUE

IN

SPAIN
(BALEARIC ISLANDS)

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Summary

An outbreak of bluetongue (serotype 2) was confirmed in a sheep flock located in Sant Lluís district, Menorca island, Balearic islands (Spain). Presence of the disease was suspected on 16 October 2003 and confirmed by laboratory testing on 27 October 2003 .

The initial information indicates that the outbreak is confined to this single flock comprising of 78 sheep, eight of which showed clinical signs. Spain has implemented control measures as required by EU rules. No further outbreaks have been reported to date. The Veterinary Directorate continues to monitor the situation and will re-assess the risks if new information becomes available.

An outbreak of ND disease in any Member State is of concern. However, the Veterinary Directorate considers that at present the risk of BT spread from this outbreak to UK via legal trade is negligible.

1. BLUETONGUE – BALEARIC ISLANDS (SPAIN)

1.1 Disease Report

On 28 October 2003, Spain notified¹ of an outbreak of bluetongue (serotype 2) in a sheep flock located in Sant Lluís district, Menorca island, Balearic Islands (Spain) (Fig.1). The presence of the disease was suspected on 16 October 2003 and confirmed by laboratory testing on 27 October 2003. The last outbreak of BT on this island was reported in November 2000. The island is located approximately 200km from the mainland Spain.



Fig.1. Bluetongue in Spain (Balearic Islands)

The initial information indicates that the outbreak is confined to this single flock of 78 sheep. Eight sheep showed clinical signs and seven of them died, while one sheep was destroyed. Epidemiological investigation is underway to determine possible source of infection.

Comment: BT virus is present in much of the Americas, Africa, southern Asia and northern Australia. While the virus is occasionally present in some areas in the southern part of Europe, recent developments indicate that it may be extending its range northwards into areas of Europe that have never been affected before².

Published data indicates that the usual range of BTV is between latitudes 35⁰ south and 40⁰ north. However in some areas in the north hemisphere, it could extend to 48⁰ (Xinjiang, China) or almost 50⁰ in Western North America The disease has recently been discovered in Kazakhstan, the furthest known limit

¹ OIE, (2003). Alert Message. Bluetongue in Spain (Balearic Islands). 28 October 2003.

² Mellor, P.S., Whittmann, E.J. (2002). (Abstract) Bluetongue Virus in the Mediterranean basin 1998-2001. The Veterinary Journal, Vol. 164, Issue 1, July 2002, 20-37,

of BT in the Northern hemisphere. These findings indicate that BT may have been endemic but not recorded. The fact that recognised vectors of BT are not known to be present in Kazakhstan may indicate a possibility of a novel vector³.

Detailed information on the disease can be found at Defra's website:
<http://defraweb/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/bluetongue.htm#eu>

2. LEGAL TRADE – CURRENT SITUATION

2.1 Live animals

The IAHD electronic database of movements notified by other Member States indicates the import of two consignments of sheep from mainland Spain for slaughter in August 2003.

2.2 Meat/meat products

Meat/meat products are not considered as a potential source of BT virus.

2.3 Germplasm

For the past three months, the IAHD electronic database indicates one importation of bovine semen in July 2003 and no importation of ovine semen.

3. COMPETENT VECTORS

It is considered unlikely that *Culicoides imicola*, the vector of BT will become established in the UK. However, the concern is that increasing range of this vector may bring the virus into contact with other *Culicoides* species, which occur much further north and are known to be competent vectors. These species may be able to spread BT viruses through a significant part of Europe, including the UK. In addition, climate change may increase vector competence and enable BT virus to survive from one year to another⁴.

³ Lundervold, M., Milner-Gulland, E.J., O'Callaghan, C.J., Hamblin, C. (2003). Short communication. First evidence of bluetongue virus in Kazakhstan. *Veterinary Microbiology*, 92, 281-287.

⁴ Wittmann, E.J., Baylis, M. (2000). (Abstract) Climate Change: Effects on *Culicoides* – Transmitted Viruses and Implications for the UK. *The Veterinary Journal*, Vol.160, Issue 2, September 2000, 107-117

4. BT RESTRICTIONS IN PLACE

4.1 Situation in Spain

Following the confirmation of BT, the Spanish authorities have applied BT control measures (a 100km protection zone, within a 150km surveillance zone) required under national and European legislation. These measures include quarantine of the affected holding, destruction of the flock, control of arthropods and wildlife reservoirs, movement control, surveillance and zoning.

4.2 European legislation - BT

4.2.1 Summary

In response to BT outbreaks, affected Member States are required to impose EU rules in the protection and surveillance zones around outbreaks. EU rules (http://europa.eu.int/eur_lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2000/l_327/l_32720001222en00740083.pdf) require Members States to control the disease according to a plan approved by the Commission, which may include vaccination outside restricted zones.

With regard to susceptible live animals, an affected member State must prevent trade from restricted zones (protection and surveillance zone), unless proven that animals come from the areas within that are free from the virus circulation or vectors. The Members State must carry out surveillance based on clinical signs, and monitoring of sentinel cattle and vector population. UK national BT legislation is available at the following website: (<http://www.hmsa.gov.uk/cgi-bin2/dialogserver?DB=hmsa-new>)

With regard to semen, EU rules require that the approved collection center and the donor animals are not subject to any animal health restrictions.

With regard to embryos, EU rules require that collection is carried out by an approved embryo collection team and that the holding of the donor females is not subject to any animal health restrictions.

4.3 International standards for embryos

In practice, collection and processing of embryos is carried out as per International Embryo Transfer Society (IETS) rules.

4.3.1 Sheep

BT in sheep is IETS category 2 pathogen. Category 2 diseases are those for which substantial evidence has accrued to show that the risk of transmission is negligible provided that embryos are properly handled between collection and transfer according to IETS manual. However, further scientific examination will be required to prove consistently that risk is negligible.

4.3.2 Cattle

BT in cattle is IETS category 1 pathogen. Category 1 diseases are those for which substantial evidence has accrued to show that the risk of transmission is negligible provided that embryos are properly handled between collection and transfer according to IETS manual.

5. ASSESSMENT OF THE RISK TO THE UK

Based on current information on the outbreak of BT in Balearic Islands (Menorca Island) in Spain, the Veterinary Directorate presently considers that with regard to:

5.1 Legal trade in:

5.1.1 Live susceptible animals

- The risk is negligible as control measures under EU rules prevent exports of animals at risk of infection,
- The risk is negligible as two consignments of sheep for slaughter were imported from Spain in August 2003 under EU rules. These rules require that animals are transported directly to slaughter and slaughtered within three days upon arrival.
- The risk is negligible as no live sheep have been imported from Spain for breeding purposes during the past three months.

5.1.2 Germplasm

- The risk is negligible as control measures under EU rules and IETS manual prevent exports of germplasm obtained from animals at risk of infection,
- The risk is negligible, because no embryos (sheep, or cattle) was imported from Spain for the past three months,
- The risk is negligible because no semen of sheep was imported for the past three months from Spain.
- The risk from bovine semen imported in July 2003 is negligible as this consignment had to comply with EU rules.

5.1.3 Meat/meat products from susceptible animals

- There is no risk because BT is not transmitted by meat/meat products.

5.2 Vectors

- The risk of vectors in the UK acquiring and transmitting BTV is not increased by this outbreak.

6. CONCLUSION

The initial information indicates that the outbreak was confined to a single sheep flock in Balearic Island. There are no reports of further disease outbreaks. Spain has taken control measures in line with EU rules.

The Veterinary Directorate continues to monitor the situation and will re-assess the risks if new information becomes available.

Spain has applied EU controls in the protection and surveillance zone around the affected holding. At present, it is considered that this outbreak poses a negligible risk to the UK animal health.

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