Information Note: Ireland's listing as a negligible BSE risk country

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) is a cattle disease which was first recognised in bovine animals in 1986. It is one of a category of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE). Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) is a TSE that has been recognised in humans for many years. In 1996 a new variant of CJD was described. It is now generally accepted that the BSE causative agent (known as a prion) caused this new variant of CJD (vCJD) in humans.

There is legislation in place[1] for the prevention, control and eradication of BSE. This legislation includes public health measures on producing products of animal origin and placing these products on the market.

Counties are classified according to their BSE status into one of three categories:

- Negligible BSE risk
- Controlled BSE risk
- Undetermined BSE risk.

Commission Decision 2007/453/EC lists the BSE status of countries or regions according to their BSE risk.

In 2021, following Ireland's re-categorisation by OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) as negligible BSE risk, the EU Commission issued Decision (EU) 2021/1321 amending the Annex to Decision 2007/453/EC as regards the BSE status of Ireland. This Decision changed Ireland's BSE status from a controlled BSE risk to a **negligible BSE risk.** This reduces the level of controls that must be applied to products of bovine origin (beef) to protect human health.

Q. What difference does this change make?

The change in the definition of bovine SRM for Ireland means that:

- Butcher shops no longer need to remove vertebral column from beef before sale to the consumer or wholesale
- Abattoirs no longer need to apply a red stripe to beef carcase labels of animals over 30 months
- Documentation is no longer needed to accompany beef sides indicating whether any vertebral column in beef sides or wholesale cuts is SRM or not e.g., sides of beef with vertebral column which is not SRM or sides of beef with vertebral column which must be removed as SRM
- Some of the tissues previously defined as bovine SRM (see below) are no longer SRM and are therefore not considered Category 1 Animal By-Product (ABP)
- Materials defined as SRM must still be stained with Patent Blue V as before.

[1] Regulation (EC) No 999/2001 laying down rules for the prevention, control and eradication of certain transmissible spongiform encephalopathies

Q. What is the new definition of bovine SRM for Ireland?

Now that Ireland has Negligible Risk Status the definition of bovine SRM is:

The skull excluding the mandible and including the brain and eyes, and the spinal cord of animals aged over 12 months.

All of the other tissues previously defined as bovine SRM, such as the tonsils, vertebral column (>30 months), the caecum, mesentery and last 4 meters of the small intestine are no longer SRM. These can now be considered as edible material if they are hygienically harvested and pass Post-Mortem Inspection. Alternatively, if these materials are not intended for human consumption bovine intestines can now be considered as Category 3 Animal By-Product provided that they are emptied and cleaned to the standard required.

Note: The following non-bovine tissues are also designated as SRM:
The skull, including the brain and eyes, the tonsils and the spinal cord of ovine and caprine animals aged over 12 months or which have a permanent incisor erupted through the gum, and the spleen and ileum of ovine and caprine animals of all ages.

Q. What is Specified Risk Material (SRM)?

Specified Risk Material (SRM) refers to a group of tissues and organs of animals which have been shown to have potential to transmit diseases such as BSE. SRM must be removed from the food and feed chain and disposed of as Category 1 Animal By-Product in accordance with prescribed legislative requirements. Category 1 is the highest risk category of Animal By-Products.
Category 1 material must be:

- Stained following removal without undue delay (the approved ink for staining SRM is E131 Patent Blue V at 0.5% weight/volume solution)
- Stored in a covered, leakproof container marked: **Cat 1- for disposal only**
- Dispatched to an approved Category 1 rendering plant
- Accompanied by a commercial document or where appropriate health certificate

Butcher shops

Q. I have a butcher shop, may I sell T-Bone Steak or similar cuts containing backbone?

Yes, traditional T-Bone steaks (containing the 'T' of bone) contains vertebral column. As the definition of SRM for Ireland no longer includes vertebral column (>30 months), there is no longer an age limit on bovines that traditional T-bone steak may be cut from.

The vertebral column of bovines over 30 months of age no longer needs to be removed as SRM and can be present in cuts of meat for supply to consumers.

Q. May I handle vertebral column in my butcher shop?

Vertebral column of bovines of any age does not come under the definition of SRM for Ireland and may be handled by any butcher.

Before this change to the legislation, vertebral column of bovines aged 30 months or over was SRM and could only be handled by retail butchers specifically authorised for this purpose.

Q. What happens to my butcher shop authorisation for removal of SRM?

S.I. No. 532 of 2015 (as amended) will be amended in line with the change to the definition of bovine SRM. There will no longer be a requirement to maintain an SRM Register as butcher shops no longer need to be authorised for the removal of vertebral column.

Q. Do I still need to keep documentation for cuts containing vertebral column before the definition changed?

The decision to change the definition of bovine SRM for Ireland was adopted on 6 August 2021 and published in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJ) on the 10 August 2021.

For the removal of vertebral column from carcasses of bovine animals aged 30 months and over **before this date,** butcher shops will need the following records:

- Documentation for all bovine carcasses or wholesale cuts containing vertebral column which you have received in the previous year, with a clear indication of the vertebral column which required removal as SRM (> 30 months) and what didn't.

- Documentation for collection of all Category 1 material by an approved haulier for the preceding two years.

Butcher shops are no longer required to have systems in place and documentation verifying the age of bovines. Vertebral column from bovines aged 30 months or over is not defined as SRM.

Slaughterhouses

Q. I have a slaughterhouse that provides carcases to butcher shops. What difference will the change to the definition of bovine SRM in Ireland make to my business?

Before the change to the bovine SRM definition for Ireland, it was necessary for slaughterhouses to:

- Apply red-striped labels to vertebral columns of beef carcases aged 30 months and over
- Insert number of beef carcases aged 30 months and over requiring vertebral column removal on Commercial Documents
- Segregate bones in the boning-hall into SRM and non-SRM

As the vertebral column from carcasses of bovines aged 30 months and over no longer comes under the definition of bovine SRM, there is no longer the need to segregate the beef carcases and indicate those requiring vertebral column removal on Commercial Documents.

Q. What difference will the change to the definition of bovine SRM in Ireland make to the disposal of waste in my business?

The definition of bovine SRM for Ireland is now '*The skull excluding the mandible and including the brain and eyes, and the spinal cord of animals aged over 12 months.'*

SRM is Category I Animal By-Product and must be disposed of accordingly.

All of the other tissues previously defined as bovine SRM, such as the tonsils, vertebral column (>30 months), the caecum, mesentery and last 4 meters of the small intestine are no longer SRM. These can now be considered as edible material if they are hygienically harvested and pass Post-Mortem Inspection. Alternatively, bovine intestines can now be considered as Category 3 Animal By-Product provided that they are emptied and cleaned to the standard expected.

Q. All of the waste generated in my slaughterhouse is collected as Category 1 material, even though only a small proportion is in fact Category 1. Is this acceptable?

Yes, this is acceptable. It is your responsibility to ensure that Animal By-Products generated in your premises are dealt with in an appropriate manner. A mixture of animal by-product categories which contains any Category 1 material must all be regarded as Category 1 material. Therefore, systems which do not provide for separation of Category 1 material from other animal by-product categories must regard all animal by-products as Category 1.
Category 1 material must be stored in dedicated, appropriately labelled, leak-proof containers, and stained prior to leaving your establishment. Your Veterinary Inspector should be informed if this is the approach you are taking.