1. Introduction

1.1 Independent scientists played an important role in the BSE story. In volume 4 of this Report, we describe how the Southwood Working Party were asked to assess and advise on the implications of BSE, and on the action that should be taken in the light of its emergence.\(^1\) For the rest of the period with which we are concerned, the advice of the Southwood Working Party was treated as the foundation of government policy. One of the first pieces of advice given by the Southwood Working Party was that there was a need to set up a committee to advise on research that should be carried out into BSE. The Government accepted that advice and, before delivery of the *Southwood Report*, the Tyrrell Committee had been set up to carry out that task.

1.2 Chapter 2 describes the setting up and deliberations of the Tyrrell Consultative Committee on Research (‘the Tyrrell Committee’). The Committee moved with speed having rightly decided that the sooner the important research projects could be put in train, the better. Its Interim Report was presented on 10 June 1989. In Chapter 3 we examine the recommendations made in the *Tyrrell Report* and the Government’s response. It was described as an ‘Interim Report’ because the Committee appreciated that there was further work to be done in peer-reviewing research projects and coordinating future research. The Government delayed publishing the Report until 9 January 1990, while funding was sought to implement the projects to which it had given priority. We consider whether the delay in publication had any adverse effects.

1.3 The Government did not call upon the Tyrrell Committee to perform any further services. Instead it invited most of the Committee’s members, under the chairmanship of Dr Tyrrell, to form a new committee, the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC). This second Committee was given a much wider remit. It was to advise not merely on research, but on any other matters in relation to transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs), in which the Government wanted guidance. The Government was to resort frequently to SEAC for advice, and to this day it has remained the primary source of expert advice to the Government on matters relating to BSE.

1.4 In Chapter 4 we look first at the setting up of SEAC, its terms of reference and the expectations, both of the Government and of the members of SEAC, of what its work would involve. We go on to consider the way in which the Government made use of SEAC, a topic which has lessons for the future. We do so in the context of examining a number of the diverse areas upon which SEAC was requested to advise, and the advice that it gave.

1.5 Throughout the period covered by this Report there were scientists and others who challenged the information being given to the public by the Government on the causes of BSE and the risks that it posed to human health. Some of these people played an important role in the BSE story. Their opinions received media coverage, and this coverage stimulated public concerns which government policy was forced to address. A polarisation tended to develop in the public debate, with dissident...
scientists, fearing that their views were being ignored by the Government, emphasising what they saw as the most pessimistic scenario in order to attract public attention. This led to their more moderate opinions, many of which have subsequently proved to be well founded, carrying less weight than they deserved.

1.6 In Chapter 5 we look at four men who consistently challenged the Government’s approach to BSE. Professor Richard Lacey and Dr Stephen Dealler were two scientists who, for much of the time, worked together in considering and writing about the implications of BSE. They believed that the risk of transmission of the disease to humans was much greater than the Government’s assessment and did not hesitate to say so. They were particularly concerned about the food risks posed by subclinical animals.

1.7 Dr Harash Narang is a microbiologist, originally employed by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS). He has his own theory on the nature of TSEs, and has devoted much energy to attempting to develop diagnostic tests for the presence of these diseases. He does not believe that these tests have received proper consideration by the Government. In Chapter 5 we consider his work and the manner in which it has been received.

1.8 Finally in Chapter 5 we consider the contribution to the consideration of the cause of BSE of a man who is not a scientist, but a farmer. Mr Mark Purdey is an organic farmer who has long had concerns about the use of organophosphorus compounds (OPs) for the treatment of cattle for warble fly infestation. Those concerns extend to a belief that such treatment has played a part in causing the emergence of BSE. In pursuing this theory, Mr Purdey has learned an impressive amount of science. His theory has received extensive media coverage and has wide popular support. We follow the part that he has played in the BSE story and the consideration given by the Government to his concerns about OPs.