3. Response to the first meeting

3.1 Between the first and the second meeting of the Working Party there was activity on a number of fronts.

Action in relation to medicinal products

3.2 Immediately after the first meeting of the Working Party, Dr Pickles wrote a minute to Dr Gerald Jones of the DH Medicines Division in what she described to Mr Lawrence as an ‘attempt to galvanise Medicines Division into some action’ (see vol. 7: Medicines and Cosmetics). She sent a copy of her minute to Dr Martin in anticipation that he might raise the matter at the next meeting of the Medicines Commission, of which he was a member. Dr Martin told us that he did inform the Medicines Commission in the summer of 1988 about the potential risk that was developing in cattle and the implications that it had for both veterinary and human pharmaceuticals. He did not, however, expect the Commission necessarily to pass on the information to the Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) or the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM), whose chairmen were not members of the Commission. He was alerting the Commission as the senior body with the final say in whether any pharmaceutical should be banned commercially.

3.3 On 30 August Sir Richard wrote to Sir Donald Acheson saying that there was a need to address the use of serum in pharmacological work and asking whether it would be possible to check the policy of the pharmaceutical companies concerned ‘through the usual channels’. In response to this he received a letter from Dr Jones on 22 September informing him:

We are currently examining the potential problems of BSE with respect to medicinal products. This will involve consideration of a number of different issues including the difficult one of use of bovine serum or BSA [bovine serum albumin] in pharmaceutical manufacture. Also we will be discussing with our expert advisory committees. I will ensure that your advisory group has all the information relating to medicinal products as soon as it becomes available.

3.4 On 6 October Sir Donald himself wrote to Sir Richard, saying:

I am informed that a considered view on the whole issue of biologicals and bovine spongiform encephalopathy should be available in late November. You will appreciate that a number of our advisory committees including the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Committee on Dental and Surgical Materials, together with their subcommittees, will have had to consider this important issue before we can reach the type of conclusion which is authoritative and which will be of most use to your Committee.
Action in respect of occupational risks

3.5 On 24 June Dr Pickles wrote to Dr David Gompertz of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) about occupational risks from exposure to BSE. She commented:

Whilst there is no evidence that scrapie let alone BSE can be pathogenic for humans, it may sound as if we run the risk of being alarmist . . . so far the popular press have not woken up to the potential here. I think we all deep down believe there is no human risk, but with the present state of knowledge about these sorts of agent it will take years to prove it. And of course we might be wrong. 39

Copies of this letter were sent to Mr Cruickshank and Mr Wilesmith, and to the new CVO, Mr Keith Meldrum, and the Director of the CVL, Dr William Watson.

3.6 On 12 September 1988 Dr Pickles met Dr Gompertz and others, including representatives from the CVL, to discuss occupational risks relating to BSE. She wrote on the following day to Dr Muriel Brown of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service:

. . . we discussed precautions that should be taken by people handling known BSE-infected material and bovine products more generally. Mr Sweasey and Mr Wilesmith were with us and we saw the recommended precautions for CVL staff. They were clearly more than adequate. Maybe those handling suspected BSE cattle before they reach the laboratory need some advice too: this will be looked into. Otherwise we saw no need to advise occupational groups who deal with cattle and bovine products more generally because of any danger from BSE. However, it would not be inappropriate to remind people that caution is needed in dealing with all animals and that increasing numbers of animal pathogens are known to be transmissible to humans. This is more a case of better education than regulations. The HSE will now be holding some more internal meetings on this issue. We were not persuaded that the topic needs to be raised formally on the ACDP agenda. 40

3.7 Dr Gompertz in his minute of the meeting added: ‘These were only tentative opinions of an ad hoc meeting.’ 41

Response to interim recommendations

3.8 On 12 July 1988 Mr Andrews was able to write to Sir Richard confirming that the Government had accepted the Working Party’s recommendation of a slaughter and incineration policy and agreed that compulsory slaughter of affected animals, with compensation up to 50 per cent of market value, would be introduced as soon as possible. The Working Party had made no recommendation as to the amount of compensation and some of them, at least, had reservations as to whether 50 per cent would suffice to ensure that farmers resisted the temptation to send animals showing symptoms off to slaughter. Mr Andrews also informed Sir Richard that he and Sir

39 YB88/6.24/4.2
40 YB88/9.13/1.1–1.3. ACDP = Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens
41 YB88/09.12/5.1
Donald agreed that there was a good case for setting up a body to coordinate and advise on research work and were in discussion about detailed arrangements.\textsuperscript{42}