4. Preparations for the second meeting

4.1 After their first meeting, the members of the Working Party set about improving their knowledge of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) by reading published research papers, by correspondence and discussion with colleagues, and by considering information provided by MAFF. Shortly after the first meeting Mr Lawrence passed on information provided by Mr Wilesmith on the transmission experiments that were in train. In October Dr Hugh Fraser, a pathologist at the NPU, informed Sir Richard that BSE had been experimentally transmitted to mice. Sir Richard considered this to be ‘exciting news’ which made it clear that they were dealing with an organism like the scrapie agent.43

Consultation of experts on TSEs

4.2 At the first meeting of the Working Party there had been discussion about obtaining evidence, orally or in writing, from Dr James Hope, the Acting Director of the NPU, and from Dr Kimberlin, who had recently retired as its Acting Director and was now an independent TSE consultant. Sir Richard wrote to Mr Lawrence asking him to contact Dr Hope and Dr Kimberlin, inviting them to provide written evidence:

I wonder if you could approach them for evidence setting out our terms of reference and saying that we are naturally most concerned about the questions of transmittability to cattle, within cattle, and from cattle to man, we will also be interested in their observations on treatments to ‘kill’ the agent, ie, means of sterilising products from infected material. We would also value any comments on their views as to the relationship between this disease and scrapie and scrapie and CJ disease. I hope you may feel this provides a reasonable basis and you should perhaps emphasise to them that whilst in no way we wish to restrict them we are conscious of the burden this is placing upon them and a relatively short response would be acceptable with an emphasis on unpublished work or their personal judgement from existing published data.44

4.3 Dr Hope responded by letter, enclosing a paper which set out details of BSE research at the NPU. In the letter he wrote: ‘... we believe BSE is a scrapie-like disease of cattle and, until we know more of its properties, the management and control of BSE should be based on understanding of scrapie in sheep.’ Later in the letter he said: ‘... we would predict horizontal and vertical spread of the disease in cattle. The risk to human health is probably very small.’45 The paper stated that the work of the NPU had confirmed the suspicion that BSE was a scrapie-like disease of cattle and described the theory that the disease had been transmitted from sheep to cattle via feed as ‘plausible’. Based on the experience of scrapie, transmission

43 YB88/10.3/1.1; YB88/10.5/1.1
44 YB88/7.18/3.1
45 YB88/11.4/6.1
from cattle to cattle seemed likely. As for the risk to humans, Dr Hope stated: ‘I believe the risk to human health is very small and that rather than blandly state “no risk to human (and animal) health” we have a responsibility to find ways of quantifying that risk.’

4.4 Dr Kimberlin wrote to say that his professional commitments as an independent consultant precluded him from providing written evidence and suggested that if he attended for a question and answer session on 10 November this would be a ‘more efficient way of guiding members of the Working Party through a complex field and helping to analyse the most important issues’.

4.5 On 3 October 1988 Sir Richard wrote to Mr Lawrence enclosing a ‘very rough outline’ of the Report that he had prepared while abroad. He asked him to start drafting, with the assistance of Dr Pickles and Mr Wilesmith, one or two of the sections in the light of the discussion they had already had and the information available to them. He added: ‘I would be happy to work on the draft so that we can have some detailed material to set before our colleagues at the next meeting.’ Mr Lawrence, Mr Wilesmith and Dr Pickles complied with this request and a number of draft sections were circulated to members of the Working Party on 8 November.