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ANIMAL BIOSECURITY POLICY MEMORANDUM 2002/41

LABORATORY RATS AND MICE AND THEIR GENETIC MATERIAL - REVIEW OF IMPORT REQUIREMENTS

This Animal Biosecurity Policy Memorandum (ABPM) advises stakeholders of a review of existing conditions for laboratory rats and mice and proposes conditions for the importation of their genetic material. Comments would be appreciated by 25 October 2002.

Revised conditions for the importation of live laboratory rats and mice were established in 1998. There is interest in the importation of highly specialised strains of laboratory rats and mice that are used for medical or research purposes. Valuable strains for use in gene knock-out studies are an example of animals which existing Australian institutions are not capable of easily and independently developing. There have also been technological advances that have enabled international movement of specialised strains via embryo transfer. Several institutions have requested Biosecurity Australia to look at the importation of embryos and semen.

In conducting a review of embryos and semen, Biosecurity Australia considered it appropriate to also review the conditions for importation of live laboratory rats and mice.

Biosecurity Australia has consulted with technical experts from a number of Australian research institutions in developing the attached discussion paper and revised draft conditions. A summary of the main issues is:

1. Import conditions for genetic material

The use of embryo transfer in laboratory animals has been increasingly used and reported as a means of ensuring that derived progeny are free of a range of pathogens. The discussion describes the specific diseases of concern and assesses the likelihood of entry of the agent concerned.

2. Pre-export testing of source colonies as an alternative to post-arrival testing

The post-arrival testing regime used for live laboratory rats and mice is not suited to embryos. During the 1998 review, post-arrival testing had been supported because at that time, certain overseas institutions were unable to perform the tests required. However, pre-export testing allows assessment of the disease status of the source colony and is the commonly employed principle for assessing other animals and products.

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3. Clarification of the existence of lymphocytic choriomeningitis in Australia

At the time of the 1998 review, it was recognised that there was serological evidence of Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis (LCM) in Australia. However, it appeared to be of limited distribution and as the disease was a zoonosis, it was included in the quarantine requirements. During the current review, investigations with research workers in Australia and the USA showed that LCM virus has been detected in populations of wild mice in the Moree and Narrabri areas of NSW in three surveys in 1989, 1991 and 1994. Significant percentages (30-52%) of mice were seropositive and the virus was isolated and found in laboratory studies to be of varying virulence depending on the strain of mouse inoculated. The Australian strain was found to be antigenically identical to prototype LCMV. It is concluded that LCM is a disease that is endemic in Australia in a geographically limited area. No movement controls exist to prevent the spread of this disease. Biosecurity Australia is therefore proposing that the quarantine requirements for LCMV be removed.

Next steps

If you wish to comment on the discussion paper and draft revised conditions, please ensure your comments reach Biosecurity Australia by 25 October 2002.

Confidentiality

Respondents are advised that, subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* and the *Privacy Act 1988*, all submissions received in response to Animal Biosecurity Policy Memoranda will be publicly available and may be listed or referred to in any papers or reports prepared on the subject matter of the Memoranda.

The Commonwealth reserves the right to reveal the identity of a respondent unless a request for anonymity accompanies the submission. Where a request for anonymity does not accompany the submission the respondent will be taken to have consented to the disclosure of his or her identity for the purposes of Information Privacy Principle 11 of the Privacy Act.

The contents of the submission will not be treated as confidential unless they are marked 'confidential' and they are capable of being classified as such in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

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