

# Imported beef products: suspension extended

Because of concerns about the link between BSE-infected British beef and variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (vCJD) in humans, importation into Australia of specified foods that contained British beef has been banned since 1996. As a precaution, because it is becoming clearer now that more countries in Europe may be affected by BSE in their cattle, the Federal Government has announced (Media Release, 5 January 2001) that it has decided to suspend temporarily the importation of foods containing beef or beef products from other countries in Europe.

There are small but significant amounts of these foods on the Australian market around 1000 tonnes per annum, which accounts for only 0.2 per cent of beef consumed annually in Australia. This food is imported almost entirely as canned or prepared food products.

The grocery industry, in consultation with State and Territory authorities, has been asked to introduce a voluntary withdrawal of all these products and consumers are being

advised to dispose of any food they may have that contains beef from a specified European country of origin.

Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Richard Smallwood, said Australia and New Zealand have no BSE in their cattle and Australian and New Zealand meat products are the safest in the world to eat.

The decision by Australia to suspend the import of foods containing beef from other countries in Europe from 8 January 2001 will be implemented in conjunction with the New Zealand Government, which has worked closely with Australia on this action.

More information on the voluntary food withdrawal can be obtained by ringing a special information phone line on 1800 200 701 or from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care's Internet site at:

<http://www.health.gov.au/issues.htm> or the Australian and New Zealand Food Authority Website:

<http://www.anzfa.gov.au/documents/fs054.asp>.