



OIA18-0155

27 APR 2018

Helen Black
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Dear Helen Black

OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST

I refer to your official information request on 2 March 2018 relating to investigations involving the serious illness experienced by three members of a Waikato family.

The following information is released to you under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

Initial food samples were collected by Waikato District Health Board (DHB) staff, and Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) staff accompanied DHB staff on a second visit to collect further food samples. A number of food items were sampled and sent for testing by the DHB. MPI did not collect, sample or test food samples on its own accord.

The DHB is the lead agency with respect to the clinical treatment of the cases and also for leading the investigation into the cause of the family's illness. Given that a food source was not immediately apparent, MPI's role was solely to provide technical assistance to the DHB, in particular around food sampling and testing for botulinum toxin genes in food cultures.

The MPI Wallaceville Animal Health Laboratory was contracted by the Institute of Environmental Science and Research (ESR Christchurch) on behalf of the DHB solely to test cultures of food samples (provided by ESR Christchurch) by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for botulinum toxin genes and other associated genes.

The DHB contracted other laboratories to test samples for other potential neurotoxins.

Information on other potential causes of the illness, such as exposure to toxic plants or other environmental chemicals from their surrounds or to people with

similar symptoms, depends on the peoples' recollections. Other foods were consumed at the same time as the pork curry and these were also sampled and sent for testing by the DHB. Samples of meat from the families' freezer were collected by the DHB. These were not tested as the source of the meat was not able to be established. MPI understands that the meat has been returned to the family but you will need to confirm this with the DHB.

We may never know the cause, but the clinical picture and information to date strongly indicates an isolated incident involving a single family without cause for wider public concern. It is worth noting that despite media reports, there is no evidence that this is linked to consumption of wild pig meat or involves 1080 poisoning.

In relation to your questions about Slow Go Disease, MPI has not investigated any linkage. However, if you wish to enquire further, I advise you consult with the DHB or a local veterinarian.

I trust this information satisfies your request.

Yours sincerely



Kate Littin
Acting Director, Animal and Animal Products