

## Farm Animals

### ANIMAL WELFARE ACTION PLAN

The European Commission's first ever Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals was debated in the European Parliament after being welcomed by the Agriculture Council in June 2006. On 12 October, 565 Members of the European Parliament out of 732, hence an overwhelmingly majority, voted in favour of Mrs. Elisabeth Jeggle's (EPPED, DE) own initiative report. This report calling for stricter animal welfare rules refers to animal protection as an "important Community goal and a permanent obligation of the EU" acknowledging the key role of animal welfare for future EU policies. It asserts that the Community should now be protecting all animals and not exclusively farm animals.

The report calls for:

- Animal welfare to be fully considered at an early planning stage in other policy areas, especially in policies such as CITES, trade and marketing standards, and sustainable development
- The protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes (Directive 86/609/EEC) to be extended in order to include animals used in teaching and basic research.
- A permanent ban on the import of wild birds into the EU.
- A ban on the import of cat and dog fur and on seal products.
- Better enforcement of the existing legislation on animal transport. The Commission is to present a report based on scientific evidence on welfare needs. The EP report states that this Commission report must be accompanied by legislative proposals on loading densities and journey times

### New Member States

Since they joined the EU in May 2004, 8 new Member States (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia) are applying a Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS) to distribute agricultural aid to their farmers under the CAP. Under this scheme, the overall envelope of direct aid available for the Member State concerned is divided by the eligible agricultural area, in order to get a flat-rate payment per hectare. The new Member States were allowed to use this system until 2008 at the latest and were exempted from the cross-compliance rules established by the 2003 CAP reform. Under cross-compliance, a farmer who doesn't respect EU minimum legal standards related to environment, public, plant and animal health and animal welfare can see its agricultural subsidies reduced proportionally to the level of non-respect. The European Commission has now proposed to extend this simplified system for an additional 2 years – until 2010 (Commission proposal COM (2006) 500 final). However, Member States that decide to extend the system beyond 2008 would have to apply full cross-compliance rules from 2009 onwards. The European Parliament is due to approve this proposal without amendment at its Plenary meeting on 14 November.

### Court of Auditors report

The European Court of Auditors has published a report on 2005 CAP spending. On animal premiums, the Court found that 1.8% of claims for suckler cows false or ineligible, with particular problems identified in Slovenia, Italy and Malta. For sheep and goat premium, 6.3% of animals inspected were over claimed, with particularly high levels in Italy and Slovenia. The Court found problems with stock registers in Greece, Spain, France, Netherlands and the UK.

In examining the implementation of the slaughter premium scheme, the Court found that weaknesses previously identifies in the cattle identification system, particularly in respect of cattle trade between Member States, continued to exist.

The full report can be consulted at:

[http://www.eca.europa.eu/audit\\_reports/annual\\_reports/docs/2005/EN/cdc.pdf](http://www.eca.europa.eu/audit_reports/annual_reports/docs/2005/EN/cdc.pdf)

## ORGANIC FARMING

The Agriculture Council held a policy debate on 24 and 25 October on a proposal for a Council Regulation on organic production and labelling of organic products.

The debate on labelling matters dealt with the possibility of introducing a European logo for products meeting high standards and depending on the content or organic ingredients in the product.

The Special Committee on Agriculture is now preparing an overall compromise text that will be submitted to the Council in December.

The Agriculture Council conclusions are available online:

[http://www.eu2006.fi/news\\_and\\_documents/conclusions/vko43/en\\_GB/1161785784270/\\_files/76138801298801373/default/91406.pdf](http://www.eu2006.fi/news_and_documents/conclusions/vko43/en_GB/1161785784270/_files/76138801298801373/default/91406.pdf)

## FVO reports

### ANIMAL WELFARE

#### Belgium

The FVO carried out a mission in Belgium from 24 to 28 April in order to assess the controls of animal welfare in holdings of laying hens, pigs and calves. Their report concludes that even though the inspection system is in place and has improved since the last FVO mission, there are still deficiencies remaining. The competent authorities have well-planned, coordinated and supervised checks in place for monitoring animal welfare but they provided inadequate technical training for inspectors and failed to meet the deadline for the transposition of Community legislation.

The transposition of Directive 1999/74/EC on the protection of laying hens, which was supposed to enter into force on 1 January 2002, was eventually transposed in October 2005, three years after the deadline given. As a result of the delay, technical training for inspectors were missing and the follow up of certain problems, such as overcrowded cages, was not guaranteed in the laying hen sector.

Concerning the welfare of calves, some deficiencies have not been detected. Additionally, some of the Community requirements on the mutilation of pigs and laying hens have not been entirely transposed.

#### UK

The FVO carried out a mission in the UK in order to assess how well EU animal welfare legislation on farms is applied. The mission took place in Scotland and Northern Ireland from 15 to 19 May 2006. The report concludes that due to delayed transposition of EU requirements for laying hens and pigs, deficiencies are still relatively common. For instance, cages with extended fronts for laying hens do not comply with EU requirements as they are smaller than the height of 35 cm requested. However, with regard to the requirements of group housing of sows, the UK had already adopted national legislation which goes beyond EU requirements set out in Directive 91/630/EEC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs. In general, there were competent inspections and welldefined inspection procedures in place but those were not always followed sufficiently.

## Latvia

The FVO carried out a mission between 7 and 17 November 2005 in order to assess certain live animal controls and contingency plans for epizootic diseases. The FVO visited two slaughterhouses in order to verify whether the animal welfare conditions comply with Directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter and killing. There was one case of stunning equipment not being readily available and a further case of pigs not having access to water. The Latvian competent authority immediately took corrective action in both cases. Concerning the holding registration and the animal identification, progress has been made in the respective sectors but the late notifications still hinder the traceability of bovine animals within the database. All in all, the animal health situation was favourable.

The full report is available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/act\\_getPDF.cfm?PDF\\_ID=5377](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/act_getPDF.cfm?PDF_ID=5377)

# Wildlife

## WILD BIRDS AND HABITATS

### Spain

The European Commission decided on 13 October to take legal action against Spain due to three breaches of EU law on the protection of birds and wildlife, notably of Directive 79/409/EEC for the conservation of wild birds and Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. Concerning the first two breaches, the Commission is sending a final written warning to Spain demanding more effective measures to protect species currently threatened by the upgrading of a former rural track in Andalusia and a motorway in the Madrid region. The third breach concerns the illegal spring hunting of birds, in particular wood pigeons, in the Vizcaya province. Following a first written warning in June 2006, the Commission now sent a final written warning on this case.

### Finland

The European Commission decided on 13 October to take legal action against Finland over its failure to fully implement the European Court of Justice judgement from 2003 on the designation of protected areas under the wild birds Directive. Although Finland has designated special protection areas for birds since the ruling, it did not include one of the most important areas called Nyhamn–Båtskär for the wintering of the bird species Steller's Eider, which is globally at risk of extinction. Therefore, the Commission sent a first written warning to Finland asking to fully comply with EU law.

### Germany

The European Commission decided on 13 October to close an infringement case against Germany concerning its failure to fully comply with the Habitats Directive 92/43 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. Germany had failed to comply with a European Court of Justice judgement that demands sufficient sites for the Natura 2000 network and was sent a final warning in December 2005 by the European Commission. However, in the meantime, the German authorities proposed a sufficient number of sites and identified further habitats and species to be protected under the Habitats directive so that the Commission decided to drop the case.

## WILD BIRDS TRADE

In an action brought on 10 August 2006 (case T-209/06) to the Court of First Instance, the European Association of Importers and Exporters of birds and live animals contests the European Commission Decision 2006/522/EC which bans the import of live birds into the Community for health reasons. The association argues that the existing quarantine rules offer adequate protection and considers that a complete ban on imports is disproportionate in light of Avian flu situation at the time the decision was adopted. Furthermore, the association complains that the Commission has misused its powers and that the measures are discriminatory because poultry is excluded from their scope.

## SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Environment Council from 23 October adopted the conclusion that "the Commission and Member States should build on the EU strategy on the sustainable use of natural resources which should be complemented by a number of targets and measures at EU level". The Environment Council identifies globalisation and economic growth as the challenges to tackle, underlining that factors such as saving natural resources, promoting more eco-efficient consumption and production as well as considering the use of market-based instruments more widely are essential. Therefore, the Environment Council invites both the Commission and Member States to endorse the following priorities:

- To outline a long-term ecological vision as anticipated in the renewed Strategy on Sustainable Development which combines the sustainable use of natural resources and sustainable consumption and production
- To set targets to improve resource-efficiency and decrease negative environmental and social impacts
- To recognise the importance of biodiversity and to highlight the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources to meet the target of significantly reducing the biodiversity loss by 2010. The European Commission will set up a EU Sustainable Consumption and Production Action Plan by 2007 that includes the key objective of identifying steps on how to improve eco-efficiency.

## Health

### BLUETONGUE

Last August, an outbreak of the Bluetongue virus affected sheep in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany. The origin of the virus was unclear as this disease is usually restricted to Southern European countries. On 25 October, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) announced that the vector being responsible for some of the spread of the disease would be a biting midge of the *Culicoides* species ( *Culicoides dewulfi* ).

The OIE discovery points out that the *Culicoides* species identified is adapted to both the Northern and Southern European climate. Scientists are now worried by the potential risk of the virus spreading throughout the EU and affecting livestock trade.

Member States will have to reconsider their disease control and surveillance methods in order to prevent new outbreaks. The Bluetongue virus is not transmissible to humans and therefore does not threaten human health. The European Commission recently adopted revised measures to extend the Bluetongue restriction zones in Belgium, France and Germany due to further cases of the virus. Around 650 bluetongue cases have been reported in Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands since the first case in mid-August.

### DISEASE ERADICATION

The European Commission endorsed a financial package of €193 million to support eradication and monitoring programmes for animal diseases on 12 October. In total, 155 programmes will benefit from EU funding to fight animal diseases in 2007. Zoonoses-animal diseases, which are transmissible to humans, will be prioritised .

Every year, the European Commission approves eradication and monitoring programmes for animal diseases to receive EU funding.

### AVIAN FLU

New research projects for avian and pandemic influenza will be granted a €28.3 million funding in addition to the €21 million already allocated under the Fifth and Sixth Framework Programmes for Research. This European Commission decision from 17 October will cover new projects dealing with human and animal health and also address research needs identified by international organisations such as the World Health Organisation, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

# Laboratory Animals

## CHEMICALS

On 10 October, the Environment Committee of the European Parliament adopted its recommendations for second reading on REACH (the regulation on the registration, evaluation and authorisation of chemicals) from rapporteur Guido Sacconi (PES, IT) with MEPs calling for the substitution of the most hazardous substances whenever possible and for the promotion of alternatives to animal testing. 42 voted in favour of the report, 12 against it plus 6 abstentions. The Environment Committee also asks for more resources to devising, validating and adopting tests not using animals and for the consultation of the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods concerning testing proposals which involve animal testing. The date for the vote in Plenary has not been fixed yet but will take place at the end of November or in December.

### Animal testing

MEPs Robert Evans (PSE, UK), Paulo Casaca (PSE, PT), David Martin (PSE, UK), Sajjad Karim (ALDE, UK) and Carl Schlyter (Greens/EFA, Sweden) launched a written declaration on primates in scientific experiments on 25 September.

The declaration says that “the Community and the Member States shall pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals” in the research policy and calls for “an immediate internationally coordinated effort to bring all non-human primate experiments to an end”.

Lapse date for the written declaration is 18 January 2007. By this deadline, a total of 367 signatures are required so that the declaration can become a Parliament resolution. On 26 October, 37 MEPs had signed the declaration. The written declaration is available online: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/decladoc/document/2006/>

## GERMANY BANS SEAL PRODUCTS

The lower house of the German Parliament voted in favour of a resolution to introduce a ban on the national import and trade of seal products on 19 October. The resolution should now lead to the setting up of a law which hopefully will be implemented shortly.

## EFSA ON GMO AUTHORISATION IN THE EU

Speaking to reporters in Brussels, EFSA chief Cathérine Geslain-Lanéelle advised the EU that it should not always follow EFSA's positive scientific opinion on GMOs and automatically authorise them. There is a considerable difference between the risk assessors (EFSA, scientists) and the risk managers (Commission, politicians), Mrs. Geslain-Lanéelle emphasises.

The Commission as risk manager should also consider factors such as control capacity, the economic impact of the authorisation and the acceptability of the product for the consumers, she concludes. (Source: Agra Facts)