

NEWS

Farm animals

Animal Welfare Action Plan

On the 25 April, the lead committee responsible for giving an opinion on the European Commission's first ever Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006- 2010 (COM(2006) 13 final) met for their exchange of views. The Agriculture Committee rapporteur Mrs Elisabeth Jeggle (EPP-ED, DE) said that the Animal Welfare Action Plan would reflect the steadily growing public concern for animal welfare and the need to have a coherent forward planning in this policy sector. Given the complexity of the issues addressed in the plan and the consequences it can have for the competitiveness of EU livestock production she pleaded to have a thorough debate on the plan which takes into account the interest of all stakeholders involved. All MEPs present stressed that EU rules on animal welfare had to be based on sound scientific and technical proof. Moreover, they stressed on the importance to impose EU animal welfare standards on producers from third countries who export their products to the European Union. There will be an expert hearing convened for the Agriculture Committee on 30 May. Adoption by the Agriculture Committee is expected in early September whilst the European Parliamentary vote in Plenary is scheduled for 28 September.

Animal Welfare Conference

On the 30 March, the Austrian Presidency hosted the first ever 'Animal Welfare Conference' in Brussels. The conference was an opportunity for the Commission to present its recently published Animal Welfare Action Plan to Member State representatives, international partners and a broad array of stakeholders from across the food chain. The conference offered the opportunity to gather input from interested parties on future EU animal welfare actions, and to look at where the responsibilities of different sectors lie in terms of promoting and protecting animal welfare. Among other issues discussed were consumer expectations, the role of animal welfare organizations, retailers' and producers' view-points, the international dimension of animal welfare protection, and socio-economic considerations.

Aquaculture

On the 6 April, the European Commission proposed measures to regulate the introduction of non-native species in aquaculture so as to prevent their possible negative impact on the surrounding environment. Non-native or alien species, such as rainbow trout or Pacific oyster, have played a crucial role in the rapid growth of the European aquaculture industry. However, the introduction of non-native species can cause a significant loss in biodiversity.

The Commission Proposal (COM(2006)154 final), which attracted wide stakeholder interest, would regulate the introduction of such species through a system of permits. The scope of the proposal is limited to movements of fish stocks which fall under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Ornamental fish are therefore not covered by the measures. The spreading of parasites and pathogens are already covered by Community legislation on animal health.

EFSA Opinion - Stunning and Killing

On the 12 April, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published an opinion from the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare relating to “Welfare aspects of the main systems of stunning and killing applied to commercially farmed deer, goats, rabbits, ostriches, ducks, geese and quail”.

The European Commission asked that EFSA should consider the following:

- The minimal conditions by which the method is likely to be efficient from the animal welfare point of view.
- The criteria or procedures that could be used to check the stunning or killing method has been effectively carried out.
- The advantages and disadvantages of the method used in terms of animal welfare, taking into account the use of the method either in slaughterhouses or on-farm for disease control purposes.
- Where relevant, the impact of the stunning/killing method used on the microbiological safety of the carcass as well as bio security considerations concerning methods used in disease control situations.

Report can be viewed following the link:

http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/ahaw/ahaw_opinions/1423_en.html

Wildlife

Wild Birds

On the 26 April, the European Commission released a report (COM(2006)164 final) on the “Implementation of Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds”. The report details overall progress achieved and covers the period 1999-2001. The report is divided into 2 parts - Part I provides a summary of information concerning the EU-15, whilst Part II contains a summary of national reports of Member States’ implementation efforts over the period 1999-2001. The purpose of the report is to support the Community’s progress in implementing the Bird’s Directive, detailing national provisions taken under the Directive. So far, over 3000 Special Protection Areas (SPAs) have been classified covering nearly 8% of EU terrestrial territory as well as an additional significant marine area of over 2.7 million hectare. Interestingly, only 4 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) have largely completed their contribution to the SPA network. National territory designated as SPAs in percentage terms also varies greatly (less than 2% in France to over 15% in Spain). There remains controversy and confrontation over the

compatibility of some Member States' hunting regimes and practices. In some countries (France, Spain and Italy) internal conflicts of interest are regularly the order of the day, resulting in accompanying extensive litigation. The report concludes that accelerated efforts are needed for the Directive to fulfil its objective of maintaining Europe's wild bird species—thereby ensuring the European Union's objective of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

Written Declaration—Tiger & Leopard Skins

The Written declaration by David Martin (PSE - UK) and Glyn Ford (PSE - UK) MEPs, on the illegal trade in tiger and leopard skins lapsed on the 1st of May with just 176 signatures. The Declaration recognized that tigers and leopards are being targeted by organized crime networks and called on the Indian, Nepalese and Chinese Governments to improve domestic enforcing efforts by establishing full time multi agency wildlife crime enforcement units.

Health

Avian Influenza (AI)

On the 4 April, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) adopted a scientific statement on 'Migratory Birds and their possible role in the spread of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza'. The Commission had requested further scientific evidence following the recently adopted opinion on "Animal Health and Welfare Aspects of AI". In particular, EFSA were asked to look at 3 areas:

- The risk posed by wild birds and particularly migratory birds in the spread of the Asian strain of AI.
- The risk the populations of wild birds will become a reservoir of the Asian Strain.
- Following the above 2 points, the risk that the virus may pose for entry, exposure, contamination, transmission and spread to birds and poultry on EU territory due to migratory birds flying along the different migratory pathways across the territory.

In consultation with the Commission it was further specified that, in the initial phase of the risk assessment, the mandate would place primary focus on:

- The probability of introduction of the Asian lineage H5N1 HPAIV by wild birds into Member States and the subsequent risk of:
 - The development of an endemic situation in wild birds in Member States.
 - The transmission of the virus to domestic poultry.

• The identification of risk factors to be considered by Member States in order to classify regions or establishments as being at increased risk of exposure from the Asian lineage H5N1 HPAIV carried by wild birds.

The risk assessment was conducted as a qualitative assessment, since a quantitative approach would have required detailed epidemiological information which currently is not available for this disease. The statement includes a list of migratory bird species currently more likely to be infected with HPAI H5N1. It concludes that the probability of Asian lineage H5N1 HPAIV being transmitted from wild birds to

poultry kept in free-range and backyard holdings in Europe or those not having high bio security measures are high.

For indoor poultry holdings, the probability is generally low providing that strict bio security measures are in place. However, the probability increases particularly for indoor holdings localized in the proximity of wetlands and with increasing prevalence of infection in the wild birds present in these wetlands. It should be noted that the scientific statement is in fact, the first part of a more comprehensive scientific opinion expected to be adopted at the end of April. The full statement can be viewed following the link:

http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/ahaw/ahaw_opinions/1438_en.html

Classical Swine Fever

Following the outbreak of swine fever in two regions of Germany in March, measures introduced to prevent the spread of the disease have subsequently been eased. The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFAH) convened on the 20 April and agreed that pigs can be transported from most parts of Germany to other Member States (MS) for direct slaughter, breeding and further fattening. It appears that the setting up of protection and surveillance zones (3 km and 10 km respectively) prevented the disease from spreading, as no further cases were discovered. Pigs transported to other MS for breeding and further fattening must come from holdings that have not received any live pigs for the previous 45 days and the MS concerned must be notified.

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- Commission Decision amending Decision 2004/453/EC as regards Sweden and the United Kingdom (OJ L99, 7.4.06, p31-34)
- Commission Decision amending Decision 1999/659/EC fixing an indicative allocation by Member State of the allocations under the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund — Guarantee section for rural development measures for the period 2000 to 2006 (OJ L106, 19.4.06, p18-20)

Health

Bluetongue

- Commission Decision amending Decision 2005/393/EC as regards the restricted zones in relation to bluetongue in Italy (OJ L98, 6.4.06, p75)
- Commission Decision amending Decision 2005/393/EC as regards the restricted zones in relation to bluetongue in Spain (OJ L99, 7.4.06, p35)

Classical Swine Fever

- Commission Decision concerning certain interim protection measures relating to Classical Swine Fever in Germany (OJ L91, 29.3.06, p61-63)
- Commission Decision concerning certain protection measures relating to classical swine fever in Germany and repealing Decision 2006/254/EC (OJ L99, 7.4.06, p36)

- Commission Decision amending Decision 2003/526/EC as regards classical swine fever control measures in Germany (OJ L104, 13.4.06, p48-50)
- Commission Decision amending Decision 2003/135/EC as regards the extension of plans for the eradication and emergency vaccination of feral pigs against classical swine fever to certain areas of North Rhine-Westfalia and Rhineland-Palatinate and the termination of these plans in other areas of Rhineland-Palatinate (Germany) (OJ L104, 13.4.06, p51-53)
- Commission Decision amending Decision 2006/274/EC concerning certain protection measures relating to classical swine fever in Germany (OJ L108, 21.4.06, p31/32)
- Commission Decision amending Decision 2006/274/EC concerning certain protection measures relating to classical swine fever in Germany (OJ L113, 26.4.06, p6-9)

Newcastle Disease

- Commission Decision amending Decision 2005/648/EC concerning protection measures in relation to Newcastle *Eurobulletin April 06* Page 8 disease in Bulgaria (OJ L95, 4.4.06, p3-5)
- Commission Decision concerning protection measures in relation to Newcastle disease in Romania Commission Decision of 27 March 2006 concerning protection measures in relation to Newcastle disease in Romania (OJ L95, 4.4.06, p6-8)

Avian Influenza

- Commission Decision concerning certain protection measures regarding imports from Bulgaria in relation to highly pathogenic avian influenza in that third country (OJ L89, 28.3.06, p52-55)
- Commission Decision amending Decision 2006/135/EC as regarding the establishment of areas A and B in certain Member States due to outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (OJ L91, 28.3.06, p33-47)
- Commission Decision amending for the second time Decision 2005/758/EC as regards the extension of the parts of Croatia subject to certain protection measures in relation highly pathogenic avian influenza (OJ L92, 30.3.06, p15/16)
- Commission Decision concerning certain protection measures in relation to a suspicion of highly pathogenic avian influenza in Switzerland (OJ L95, 4.4.06, p9-11)
- Commission Decision amending Decision 2006/115/EC concerning certain protection measures in relation to highly pathogenic avian influenza in wild birds in the Community (OJ L103, 12.4.06, p29-32)
- Commission Decision amending Commission Decision 2006/135/EC as regarding the establishment of areas A and B in certain Member States due to outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (OJ L107, 20.4.06, p44-53)