



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



6199/08 (Presse 33)

PRESS RELEASE

2849th Council meeting

Agriculture and Fisheries

Brussels, 18 February 2008

President **Iztok JARC**
Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food

P R E S S

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Main results of the Council

The Council held a policy debate on the “health check” of the Common Agricultural Policy reform.

The Council examined five proposals concerning the placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Without discussion, the Council adopted conclusions on the fisheries partnership agreement with Mauritania and a decision on the position of the Community on certain adaptations of the agreement with Switzerland on trade in agricultural products, and on the agreement with the Faroe Islands with regard to the movement of registered equidae.

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission of a regulation amending the age of withdrawal of the vertebral column in the framework of the prevention of certain transmissible encephalopathies.

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

PARTICIPANTS

The Governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

Belgium:

Ms Sabine LARUELLE

Minister for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses, the Liberal Professions and the Self-Employed and Agriculture

M. Kris PEETERS

Minister-President of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Institutional Reform, Harbours, Agriculture, Sea Fisheries and Rural Policy

Bulgaria:

Mr Nihat KABIL

Minister for Agriculture and Forestry

Czech Republic:

Mr Petr GANDALOVIČ

Minister for Agriculture

Denmark:

Ms Eva Kjer HANSEN

Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries

Germany:

Mr Gert LINDEMANN

State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection

Estonia:

Mr Tiit NABER

Deputy Permanent Representative

Ireland:

Ms Mary COUGHLAN

Minister for Agriculture and Food

Greece:

Mr Konstantinos KILTIDIS

State Secretary for Rural Development and Food

Spain:

Mr Josep PUXEU

Secretary General of Agriculture and Food, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Minister for Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Agriculture of the Autonomous Community of Canary Islands

Ms Pilar MERINO TRONCOSO

France:

Mr Michel BARNIER

Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries

Italy:

Mr Paolo DE CASTRO

Minister for Agricultural and Forestry Policy

Mr Gian Paolo PATTA

State Secretary for Health

Cyprus:

Mr Christodoulos PHOTIOU

Director, Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment

Latvia:

Mr Mārtiņš ROZE

Minister for Agriculture

Lithuania:

Ms Kazimira Danutė PRUNSKIENĖ

Minister for Agriculture

Luxembourg:

Mr Fernand BODEN

Minister for Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development, Minister for Small and Medium-sized Businesses, the Liberal Professions and the Self-Employed, Tourism and Housing
State Secretary for Relations with Parliament, State Secretary for Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development, State Secretary for Culture, Higher Education and Research

Ms Octavie MODERT

Hungary:

Mr József GRÁF

Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development

Malta:

Mr Matthew DEBORNO

Economic Officer, Ministry of Rural Affairs and the Environment

Netherlands:

Ms Gerda VERBURG

Minister for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality

Austria:

Mr Josef PRÖLL

Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, the Environment and Water Management

Pologne:

Mr Marek SAWICKI

Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development

Portugal:

Mr Jaime SILVA

Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries

Romania:

Mr Dacian CIOLOȘ

Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development

Slovenia:

Mr Iztok JARC

Ms Branka TOME

Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food
State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food**Slovakia:**

Ms Zdenka KRAMPLOVÁ

Minister for Agriculture

Finland:

Ms Sirkka-Liisa ANTILA

Minister for Agriculture and Forestry

Sweden:

Mr Eskil ERLANDSSON

Minister for Agriculture

United Kingdom:

Lord ROOKER

Minister of State for Sustainable Food and Farming and Animal Health

Commission:

Ms Mariann FISCHER BOEL

Member

ITEMS DEBATED**GMOs**

The Council did not establish a qualified majority, either for or against, five proposals for decisions on the marketing of four varieties of genetically modified maize – variety MON863xNK603 ([16782/07](#)), variety MON863xMON810 ([16783/07](#)), variety MON863xMON810xNK603 ([16784/07](#)) and variety GA21 ([5946/08](#)) - and a potato variety EH92-527-1 ([16785/07](#)).

The Council having concluded its proceedings on these files, the Commission is now entitled to finalise the decision-making procedures, in accordance with the regulatory procedure provided for in Article 5 of Decision No 1999/468 of 28 June 1999 laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission.

Health Check

The Council held a *policy debate* on the communication on the "**health check**" of the CAP since its 2003/2004 reform (15351/07).

The discussion was framed by a Presidency questionnaire (6159/08), focusing on identifying the **three main priorities** of each member state and the measures necessary to ensure a "**soft landing**" on the expiry of the **milk quota regime** in 2015.

The Council invited its preparatory bodies to continue work, with a view to agreeing Council conclusions in March.

AOB**(a) Drought – Request from the Cypriot delegation**

The Council took note of an information from the Cypriot delegation (6302/08), supported by the Greek and Maltese delegations, concerning the severe drought affecting these countries.

Cyprus is currently examining ways and means to provide support to affected farmers and stock breeding.

Commissioner Fischer-Boel stressed that she was well aware of the seriousness of the damage caused by drought in Cyprus and other Mediterranean Member States.

She encouraged Cyprus to examine with the appropriate Commission services how Cyprus Rural Development Programmes for 2007-2013 could be amended to include the restoration of agricultural and forestry structures and tools for prevention. Furthermore, she recalled that if there had been income losses, Cyprus should notify national aids aimed to compensate such losses.

(b) Critical situation on the pork market - Request from the German delegation supported by the French delegation

The Council took note of the German and French request ([6392/08](#)), supported by the Belgian, Czech, Irish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Hungarian, Austrian, Polish, Romanian and Slovak delegations, calling for further measures to stabilise the difficult situation on the pig market due to the persistently low prices for pigmeat and piglets and to high feed costs resulting from increased cereal prices.

100 000 tonnes of pigmeat for the entire EU, including roughly 13 000 tonnes in Germany, were temporarily withdrawn from the market and put into private storage up to the end of the year.

The Commission representative informed the Council that a proposal to extend the private storage for three months would be submitted to the Management Committee on 21 February.

(c) Trade in illegal timber in relation to CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) - Request from the Netherlands delegation

The Council noted the information from the Netherlands following the 14th Conference of the Parties of CITES in June 2007 and the Netherlands' initiative to hold a separate Ministerial Round Table held at that meeting ([6503/08](#)).

The importance of CITES as a legal instrument to combat illegal trade in timber was pointed out by the Netherlands Minister, supported by the United Kingdom, German and Swedish delegations. She encouraged the Commission and member states to envisage how the EU could best build on the outcome of the CITES Ministerial Round Table in order to:

- strengthen the role of CITES in combating illegal trade in timber;
- further improve the implementation and enforcement of CITES within the EU and beyond;
- optimise the relationship of the various Multilateral Environmental Agreements in order to further this aim.

In May 2003, the European Commission adopted the EU Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), which obtained support from the Agriculture Council of the European Union in October 2003 and the European Parliament in early 2004.

The Commission representative acknowledged that CITES, among other legal instruments and EC initiatives, will contribute to the global effort to tackle illegal logging and confirmed the Commission's intention to present in May 2008 a communication on possible additional legislative measures to combat illegal logging and related trade.

(d) Bluetongue: Community funding of vaccination - Request from the Netherlands delegation

The Council noted the request from the Netherlands delegation ([6460/08](#)), supported by the Belgian, Czech, Danish, French, German, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Luxembourg, Polish, Slovak, Spanish and Swedish delegations regarding sufficient allocation of financial resources¹ to a mass bluetongue vaccination programme.

(e) Bluetongue: economic damage - Request from the Belgian delegation supported by the French delegation

The Council was informed by the Belgian delegation ([6462/08](#)), supported by the French delegation, about the important economic losses caused by bluetongue in northern Europe.

These member states called for exceptional co-financed market measures as provided for in Articles 44 to 46 of Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007.

Bluetongue was unknown in Belgium until 19 August 2006, when the first case was recorded.

Commissioner Fischer Boel acknowledged the very particular case of this bluetongue virus strain, which now seems to be endemic in northern Europe.

However, she stated that the current situation did not justify any exceptional market measures at this stage.

In just a few months it had spread like wildfire throughout the country and in several Western European Member States: the Benelux countries, Denmark, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and even Switzerland were all affected. All these countries were hit by the serotype 8 virus, which originated in sub-Saharan Africa.

Bluetongue is an insect-borne viral disease which affects domestic and wild ruminants. It does not affect humans and there is no risk of the disease being contracted or spread through meat or milk. The disease neither imposes a slaughter requirement nor has any impact on public health.

¹ Existing rules under Article 3 of Decision 90/424/EEC provide for 100 % payment of the cost of the vaccine and 50 % of vaccination and administrative costs, within the limits of a given ceiling per animal.

(f) Eligibility criteria for the bovine slaughter premium - request from the Swedish delegation

The Council took note of the concern expressed by the Swedish delegation, with the support of the Austrian, Danish, French, Netherlands and Portuguese delegations, regarding a court ruling¹ interpreting a delay in the notification of the birth of a bovine animal as rendering that animal ineligible for the slaughter premium ([6509/08](#)).

The Commission representative informed the Council that a solution could be envisaged for 2008 and the following years, but that 2007 was still under consideration by the Commission legal services.

(g) WTO negotiations on the Doha programme for development – information from the Commission

The Council was updated by Mariann Fischer Boel² on the state of play of the agricultural strand of the WTO negotiations³.

An overwhelming majority of delegations,⁴ expressed their concern with regard to the asymmetry between the individual areas of negotiation: Agriculture - including Geographical Indications - NAMA, Services and Rules.

While reaffirming their strong support for Mariann Fischer Boel to take a firm position in the agriculture negotiations, these delegations urged prudence, stressing that the EU was already at the limit of the mandate agreed by the Council and that it was now time for other negotiating partners to take further steps towards an agreement.

The Presidency concluded that the Council would keep the matter under review during the crucial coming weeks.

¹ Judgment of the Court C/45 of 24 May 2007, Maatschap Schonewille-Prins v. Minister van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit.

² Peter Mandelson had provided overall information on the negotiations a few hours earlier, during the GAERC meeting.

³ For the last document from WTO Agriculture Committee Chair, Crawford Falconer, circulated on 8 February, see http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/chair_texts08_e.htm

⁴ Twenty-two delegations took the floor on that point.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**FISHERIES****Review of the protocol to the Fisheries Partnership Agreement with Mauritania - Council conclusions**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Having regard to its Regulation (EC) No 1801/2006 of 30 November 2006 on the conclusion of the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Community and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania,
2. Recalling the declared intention of the Commission to review the protocol and the Member States' invitation in the Council to the Commission to seek a negotiated solution instead of terminating the protocol, and that on 29 January 2008 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the Commission and the Mauritanian authorities wherein they define the parameters for the review negotiations,
3. REAFFIRMING that the Council Conclusions of 16 July 2004 on an integrated framework for fisheries partnership agreements with third countries set the principle political framework for the review of agreements and/or protocols in force and the negotiation of new agreements and/or protocols,
4. Against this background, THE COUNCIL WELCOMES the Commission's efforts to pave the way for a negotiated solution by the signing of the MoU,
5. FAVOURS the idea of an amended protocol with a period of validity of 4 years because of the added stability this would provide for the Parties to this Fisheries Partnership Agreement,
6. RECOGNISES the need to seek fishing opportunities set at a level reflecting the right balance between a realistic up-take of fishing opportunities by the Community fleet and the financial contribution to Mauritania - thus ensuring an appropriate utilisation of Community funds,

7. UNDERLINES that the Commission was invited to take account of scientific advice, track records for up-take by Member States in the various categories in recent years and realistic fishing plans of the concerned fleets when negotiating the levels of fishing opportunities,
8. TAKES NOTE of the level of fishing opportunities set out in the MoU and CONSIDERS it to serve as an orientation for adjustment in a modified protocol subject to final agreement between the parties, without prejudice to further adjustments, as appropriate, consistent with the financial compensation,
9. WELCOMES the introduction of a flexibility mechanism and INVITES the Commission to ensure that the functioning of this mechanism is simple and shall not burden operators with excessive additional costs, and that it should not impede further development of fisheries within the boundaries of the biological condition of the stock and the availability of the EU fleet, and respecting the needs of the Mauritanian fishing sector,
10. CONSIDERS that to improve utilisation of fishing opportunities and to enhance clarity and transparency for all parties it is necessary to modify some technical conditions and to clarify and explore ways to improve the appeal procedure for all alleged infringements,
11. NOTES the financial aspects as set out in the MoU and that the Commission intends to pursue a basic objective of integrating the Mauritanian fisheries sector in the national economy of that country, among others by exploiting the potential of added value in the pelagic fisheries,
12. INVITES the Commission to take action aiming at improving port infrastructures and services, and to pay special attention to regional cooperation in the management of straddling stocks,
13. THE COUNCIL REASSURES the Commission of the Member States' assistance in seeking a satisfactory solution to the issues listed in the MoU, AND IS LOOKING FORWARD to being regularly and fully informed by the Commission on the progress of the review negotiations."

AGRICULTURE

EU/Faroe Islands - import of registered equidae

The Council adopted a decision approving a Community position to be adopted within the EC-Faroe Islands joint committee on the amendments to Decision No 1/2001 as regards the import of registered equidae directly from Iceland and the movement of registered equidae between the Faroe Islands and the European Community (16044/07).

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA**EU/Switzerland - Trade in agricultural products**

The Council adopted a decision on the position to be adopted by the Community within the joint committee on agriculture on the adaptation of Annexes 1 and 2 to the agreement with Switzerland on trade in agricultural products, to take account of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU and of the consolidation of preferential trade in sausages and certain pigmeat products (16484/07).

The agriculture agreement concluded with Switzerland entered into force in June 2002.

APPOINTMENT**Committee of the Regions**

On a proposal from the Spanish government, the Council adopted a Decision appointing

- (a) as a member
 - Mr Pedro CASTRO VÁZQUEZ, Alcalde de Getafe (Madrid), and
- (b) as alternate members:
 - Ms Esther MONTERRUBIO VILLAR, Comisionada para las Relaciones Exteriores del Gobierno de Aragón, Comunidad Autónoma de Aragón,
 - Mr Francisco DE LA TORRE PRADOS, Alcalde de Málaga,