

COUGHLAN WELCOMES EU INITIATIVE ON AVIAN INFLUENZA

The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Ms Mary Coughlan TD, today welcomed the unanimous outcome of the two-day meeting of the EU Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH), attended by officials of her Department, which concluded in Brussels this evening.

The Minister said that she was confident that the measures being taken with regard to biosecurity would reduce the risk of the introduction of avian influenza into the EU and confirmed that she would move immediately to implement such measures as are appropriate in an Irish context, taking full account of the criteria and risk factors set out in the Decision.

Ms Coughlan particularly welcomed the risk-based approach adopted by the Committee which she said was 'entirely in keeping with the approach adopted by my own Department over the past couple of months, particularly since the confirmation of the outbreaks in Russia and Kazakhstan and, of course, over the past week following developments in Turkey and Romania.'

Commenting on the public health concerns, the Minister said that she noted that the Committee expressed the opinion that 'the public is far less likely to be exposed in Europe than in Central Asia or the Far East because of the generally greater separation of humans and commercially kept birds in Europe.'

The Minister said that the 'early warning system', already introduced by the Department of Agriculture and Food, would meet the requirement in the Decision to introduce 'early detection systems'. The Department has made immediate arrangements to update the other stakeholders - the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Association of Regional Game Councils and Birdwatch Ireland - as to the operation of the 'early warning system' at a meeting on Monday next to discuss the measures adopted in today's Decision.

Ms Coughlan confirmed that such legislative measures as may be necessary to give full effect to the Decision in Ireland will be taken without delay and she said that she looked forward to 'informing the Commission by 5 November of the measures taken to ensure proper implementation of this Decision.'

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