

## **WTO AND AVIAN INFLUENZA DISCUSSED BY MINISTER COUGHLAN IN LUXEMBOURG**

The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Ms Mary Coughlan TD, today attended a special meeting in Luxembourg of EU Foreign Affairs Ministers at which both the WTO negotiations and Avian Influenza were discussed. The meeting heard reports from both Commissioners Mandelson and Fischer Boel on the Commission's disposition in the WTO negotiations and on the current state-of-play. The recurring themes which emerged from the contributions of Member States were:

- The need to ensure that the integrity of the CAP is respected and that negotiating positions do not countenance any further CAP reform;
- The need for improved transparency and closer and more timely communication between the Commission and Member States as negotiations progress;
- The need for balance in the WTO negotiations as between elements which fall under the agriculture heading and between agriculture and other elements.

In her contribution Minister Coughlan stressed that agriculture could not be sacrificed for the sake of overall agreement and along with France and a number of other Member States called for a thorough technical evaluation by the Commission and Member States jointly of the social and economic outworkings within the EU of any negotiating offers made by the Commission. The Minister said she believed the meeting will have contributed to a much better level of understanding between Commission and the Member States in the conduct of the negotiations going forward and should have "cleared the air" on difficulties which may have arisen. As regards WTO, the meeting concluded with agreement that in the light of the significance of these issues and in the run-up to the conference in Hong Kong on 13-18 December, the Council will revert to the matter at its forthcoming meetings and will meet as appropriate during the Conference itself in order to provide the Commission with any further necessary guidance.

On Avian Influenza, the meeting noted the current position and expressed support for the measures being taken by the Commission and Member States to address the threat posed by the disease. Minister Coughlan underlined the importance which Ireland attaches to effectively addressing the Avian Influenza issue from both a public health and veterinary standpoint. The Minister welcomed the very high priority being given this issue by the EU. The Minister said that the veterinary aspects of the issue would be discussed at the forthcoming Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting, while the public health aspects will be the focus of particular attention at a meeting of EU Health Ministers in London later this week.

Minister Coughlan said she is satisfied that appropriate mechanisms are in place and operating in Ireland to deal with the veterinary dimension of this issue. She also said also said that her Department had yesterday met representatives of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Birdwatch Ireland and the National Association of Regional Game Councils to consider the 'early detection system' measures provided for in the Commission decision of Friday last. The meeting also reviewed the effective operation of the 'early detection system' which the Department some time ago put in place with these stakeholders. Her Department is also continuing to liaise with the Department of Health and Children.

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