

## **MINISTER COUGHLAN ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONARY AVIAN INFLUENZA MEASURES**

As part of the ongoing focus on protecting Ireland against the threat to poultry posed by avian influenza, the Minister for Agriculture & Food, Mary Coughlan TD, today introduced a number of additional precautionary measures. Such measures take account of recent avian 'flu-related developments in central and eastern Europe and the consequential decisions taken by the European Commission.

The additional measures introduced by the Minister have been given weight of law by two Statutory Instruments (S.I.s) which she signed today. The first S.I. provides for (a) an immediate ban on the collection of poultry and captive birds for poultry markets, shows, exhibitions and cultural events (other than under licence) and (b) record keeping and the reporting of unusual or unexplained patterns of bird mortalities at commercial premises. The second S.I. provides for the registration, with the Department, of all poultry flockowners and owners of premises where captive birds are kept for sale or for sporting purposes. The register will come into operation on 7 November and applications for registration will have to be made to the Department by 31 December 2005. The ban on markets and other events is being introduced following an EU Commission Decision of 21 October, while the reporting of unusual or unexplained patterns of death in poultry and captive birds will be a further element in the Department's 'early warning system'. Both measures will apply throughout the country with immediate effect. The ban on the collection of poultry and captive birds for markets, shows, exhibitions and cultural events will be reviewed before 1 December.

The registration of all flockowners and premises where captive birds are kept for sale or for sporting purposes will provide the Department with critical information needed to identify and map the precise locations where all such birds are kept. Such information will be used in the event of an outbreak of disease. The use of the Department's technological capability to electronically map such locations and accurately determine restriction and control zones will be a key element in the Department's ability to respond speedily and accurately to any outbreak of disease.

Ms Coughlan said that a register of all premises "will greatly enhance the Department's ability to manage this type of situation and will enable us to respond more effectively to any outbreak". The Minister said that the Department's very considerable ICT capability, which is the product of ongoing planning, development and investment over recent years, will be invaluable in underpinning its capacity to deal rapidly and effectively with any suspect or confirmed outbreak of avian 'flu.'

The Minister said that the decision to proceed with the measures introduced today is "entirely consistent with our approach to date. It represents a further measured and proportionate response to the risk of the introduction of the disease". She said that the Department had "at all times complied fully with its international obligations and continues to be guided by the best available veterinary advice and expertise, at both national and EU levels. The additional precautionary measures now being put in place are further evidence of our commitment to give full and speedy effect to the EU measures insofar as they are appropriate in Irish circumstances". In this regard, a measure to give full effect in Irish legislation to the ban on importing captive and pet birds from outside the EU was being finalised.

The Minister said that her Department was continuing to consider the introduction of other measures, including additional biosecurity measures in potentially high-risk areas as provided for in the recent Commission Decision. Minister Coughlan welcomed the statement issued by the EU Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health yesterday and, in particular, the comment that "properly cooked poultry or eggs cannot be a source of infection" and that, consequently, "EU consumers can be reassured about any possible risk related to the consumption of poultry meat or other products from poultry".

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