

COUGHLAN URGES CONTINUED VIGILANCE ON BIRD 'FLU FOLLOWING COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING

The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mary Coughlan T.D., speaking in Brussels today following a meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers, said that Commissioner Kyprianou and a number of the Member States affected by avian 'flu in recent weeks had provided a very informative update on the situation at European level. Minister Coughlan said that she fully supports the efforts of the EU Commission and Member States to contain the outbreaks and in adopting strict measures to avoid further spread of the disease. The virus to date has occurred only in the wild bird population within the EU and so far has not been found in the commercial sector. The Commission is to examine the issue of compensation for poultry farmers who are not directly affected but suffer losses because of the restrictions on trade and the fall in consumption, and to submit proposals as soon as possible. Opinion is divided on the use of vaccines and discussions are taking place in various Expert groups on this particular issue.

The Commission has been asked to collect and analyse the latest data from Member States on the incidence of the bird 'flu virus in wild birds. Any adjustments that need to be made to the latest measures taken will be submitted to the EU Veterinary Experts Group for decision.

The Minister repeated earlier assurances that Ireland had in place a robust range of contingency measures and urged poultry flockowners and the public to heed the advice being offered by her Department. In particular, Minister Coughlan, said that it was very important that all flockowners took all reasonable measures to prevent contact between wild birds and domestic poultry and other birds.

She added that flockowners should also ensure now that they will be in a position to keep poultry indoors in the event that it becomes necessary to require this on a compulsory basis.

“We are not yet at that stage but it is a measure under consideration and one which would help to prevent contact between wild birds and domestic poultry. There are a number of factors which have to be taken into account and we must balance a number of interests before taking the decision to require the compulsory housing of poultry. I have asked the Expert Advisory Group which I established last week under the chairmanship of Professor Michael Monaghan to advise me as to the circumstances in which such a move would be appropriate.” The Minister also confirmed that a ban had now been extended to all shows and other gatherings of poultry and other birds.

Concluding the Minister said that while it was important that everybody maintained their vigilance, it was equally important that people maintained a sense of balance and proportion. While the threat has increased, the main focus must continue to be on maintaining good biosecurity measures and reporting any unusual patterns of mortality in wild birds. In this regard the Minister repeated the avian 'flu helpline number which is 01-607 2512. 20 February, 2006 All of the information featured on this page is the copyright of the Department of Agriculture and Food unless otherwise indicated.