

MINISTER REVOKES BAN ON PARTICIPATION OF BRITISH BIRDS IN SHOWS, EXHIBITIONS AND GATHERINGS

The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mary Coughlan T.D., announced today that she is revoking the prohibition on the participation in Irish shows, exhibitions and other gatherings of birds imported from Britain since 1 January 2007.

Ms Coughlan said that the decision to revoke the measure, introduced early last week, was taken after the publication, by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in London, of an interim epidemiological report into the recent outbreak of H5N1 avian 'flu in Suffolk and following consultation with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Belfast.

Following publication of their report today, Defra confirmed that they were rescinding their British-wide ban on all poultry gatherings, other than in the Restricted Zone around the Suffolk turkey farm, which was introduced in the immediate aftermath of confirmation of the presence of the H5N1 virus.

Minister Coughlan confirmed that the ban on British birds in Irish shows and gatherings had been a natural extension of and consistent with the British ban and was introduced at the same time as a similar ban was introduced in Northern Ireland, as part of an all-island approach to the threat posed by the closer proximity of avian 'flu. Neither of those bans extended to birds on either side of the border and birds from both sides of the border were free to participate in shows and gatherings anywhere on the island.

The Minister said that DARD was also revoking its ban, thus maintaining the all-island approach. Minister Coughlan said that her decision reflected the outcome to date of the Defra investigation, which had confirmed that the virus strain found in Suffolk was 'essentially identical' to that found in Hungary last month, though she noted Defra's assertion that their investigation was ongoing and will continue to be all-embracing in respect of the possible means of introduction of the virus. Minister Coughlan concluded that any measures taken had to be soundly based and proportionate and she said that she was satisfied, based on today's epidemiological report from Defra, that bird shows and gatherings involving birds from Britain did not pose an increased risk of introducing highly pathogenic H5N1 avian 'flu to Ireland.

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