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Dear Rob

**AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL: 23 SEPTEMBER 2013**

I am writing to provide you with a short report on the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting which I attended in Brussels on the 23 September 2013. The report is attached.

I am copying this letter to the Convener of the European and External Relations Committee, for information.

**RICHARD LOCHHEAD**

## **REPORT ON THE EU AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL: 23 SEPTEMBER 2013**

### **SUMMARY**

1. Agriculture Ministers discussed compromise proposals presented by the European Parliament on the outstanding Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) elements of the CAP reform package. By qualified majority, Ministers agreed to small adjustments to the Council mandate by increasing the co-financing rate for less developed regions, outermost regions and small Aegean islands from 75% to 85% and including the Rural Development allocation to be set out in an annex in the Basic CAP regulation. It was hoped these small changes would secure a final deal with the European Parliament and conclude the overall reform. There were no fisheries items for discussion at this Council.
2. *Following Council an agreement on the 24 September was reached at a final trilogue between Council and the European Parliament on the MFF issues. Subject to formal approval and adoption by both Institutions this should complete CAP reform by the end of the year.*
3. The Agriculture and Fisheries Council of the Lithuanian Presidency was chaired by Mr Vigilius Jukna, Lithuanian Minister for Agriculture.

### **KEY OUTCOMES**

#### **Agriculture – CAP Reform**

4. The Presidency reported on a trilogue meeting with the European Parliament held on 17 September in which the European Parliament set out its compromise proposals on the outstanding MFF issues of CAP reform. Although the Council had previously made clear these issues were not up for negotiation, the Presidency sought an amended Council mandate in order not to jeopardise the political agreement reached at the end of June, allowing them to conclude proceedings with the European Parliament.
5. The detail was discussed at a Member State Ministers only lunch arranged by the Presidency. By the end of the lunch Ministers had agreed final adjustments and formal Council resumed to vote. Poland voted against and Hungary and the Czech Republic abstained, giving the Presidency a qualified majority to revise the mandate to take to trilogue.

## **AOB**

6. In addition, a number of other items were covered under any other business:

### **African Swine Fever**

7. Poland briefed the Council on the potential risk of African Swine fever spreading to the EU and the need for action in light of a recent outbreak of the disease close to the borders of Poland and Lithuania. Poland urged the Commission to take action to prevent the disease spreading into EU territory and to guarantee financial resources to compensate any impacts of a potential outbreak. Commissioner Borg referred to the €2.5 million the Commission had already authorised to Poland, Latvia and Lithuania to put in place preventative measures and would look to address indirect financial losses via the veterinary fund, should these occur.

### **Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES)**

8. The Netherlands delegation asked the Commission to increase the transparency and public availability of traded animal data contained on TRACES. The Commission reminded Council of the limits of public transparency of the system due to confidentiality rules and announced that a meeting regarding this issue would take place at a TRACES working group in October.

### **New EU Forest Strategy**

9. Commissioner Ciolos introduced the new EU forest strategy published on 20 September. The strategy focuses on sustainable forest management and how the EU could contribute to this through common policies. Ciolos commented that the rural development fund, structural funds, Horizon 2020 and LIFE+ funding were all potential funding sources for achieving this. Member States supported the new strategy and the idea of having a more coordinated approach across the EU.

### **International trade negotiations**

10. The Commission provided an update on the state of play of negotiations on international trade agreements, including the Canada-EU agreement and the USA Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). At Scotland's request the UK raised the importance of considering issues such as maintaining geographical protection of products like Scotch whisky and the importance of ensuring products like Haggis currently banned from the US market are included as part of any final agreement. The Commission explained that they were involved in many on-going trade and agriculture negotiations and would provide updates to the Trade Policy Committee.

### **33<sup>rd</sup> Conference of Directors of EU Paying Agencies**

11. Ireland presented conclusions of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Conference of Directors of EU Paying Agencies, held in Dublin in April 2013, when Ireland held the Presidency of the European Council. The purpose of the conference was to consider the implications of CAP reform for Member State paying agencies. They concluded that there were a number of potential difficulties in implementing CAP reform, including the new greening requirements and the potential for higher error rates of misreporting Ecological Focus Areas. The next Conference of Directors of EU Paying Agencies will be held in Vilnius on 23-25 October.

### **Congress on Organic Farming**

12. The Presidency briefed Council on the outcomes of the 7<sup>th</sup> European Organic Congress which took place in Vilnius in July 2013. The industry-led conference considered how they might shape the future of organic agriculture at a time when the Commission is developing a proposal to amend the current regulation on organic farming. The Commission announced its intention to present an agriculture action plan at a future Council.

### **Protein Crops**

13. Slovenia presented the main conclusions of the recent International Conference on furthering the production of GMO free protein crops in the Danube. A number of Member States, including Austria, Hungary and Italy supported the call from Slovenia to strengthen the cultivation of protein crops in the EU in order to limit dependency on imported feed, the majority of which is GM. The Commission commented that the new CAP contained measures to support the production of protein crops through greening measures and couple support.