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17 March 2014

Dear Rob

**AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL: 17 February 2014**

I am writing to provide you with a report on the outcomes of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting which I attended in Brussels on the 17 February 2014.

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

**RICHARD LOCHHEAD**

## AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL REPORT: 17 FEBRUARY 2014

### SUMMARY

1. Ministers discussed the future of the **dairy sector** post 2015 when the milk quota system will end. An orientation debate was held on the Commission's proposal for **promotion of agricultural products**. The Commission presented to Council its proposal to merge and streamline the **school fruit and milk schemes**. Under AOB, the Commission provided an update on the state of the latest **delegated acts** under the reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). Member States strongly supported the Commission's attempts to lift a disproportionate Russian trade ban of EU pigs and pig products, since the confirmation of the two cases of **African swine fever** were found in wild boar in Lithuanian and one new case in Poland.
2. The new Hellenic Presidency also set out its work programme in agriculture and fisheries until the end of June. Key priorities include: the completion of the CAP delegated acts; finalising the work on the agreement reached with the European Parliament on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and progressing work on the Smarter Rules for Safer Food package.
3. In the margins of Council, Mr Lochhead and UK Minister Mr Eustice met with Commissioner Ciolos seeking the Commission's views on how the Scottish Government might use the minimum activity provision in the CAP regulations to help stop future "slipper farming" in Scotland. Mr Lochhead also raised coupled support in Scotland and the Commissioner confirmed that the UK's limit on coupled support in the CAP rules applies to the member state as a whole.
4. Council was chaired by the Greek Presidency Minister for Rural Development and Food, Athanasios Tsiftaris.

### KEY OUTCOMES

#### **Future of the Dairy Sector**

5. Council held a debate on the future of the dairy sector post 2015 when the milk quota system will end. By the end of the debate it was clear two camps had emerged; those in favour of a 'soft landing' approach to enable a smooth transition when the system ends; and those who would like further market intervention beyond that provided for in the CAP reform. The Presidency noted the debate and discussion will continue in the Special Committee on Agriculture.

#### **Promotion Measures for Agriculture Products**

6. An orientation debate was held on the new proposal for promotion measures of agriculture products on the internal market and in third countries. The proposal was presented at the last Council meeting in December. The Commission emphasised the focus in the proposal on third country markets. However, a large number of Member States also saw added value of promotion to be allowed on the internal market and for national co-financing to be maintained. The Presidency will continue to work on this proposal in an attempt to seal a deal before the European Parliament elections.

## **School Fruit and Milk Schemes**

7. The Commission presented its proposal to merge and streamline the school fruit and milk schemes. The majority of Member States welcomed the initiative aimed at helping to promote healthy eating in school children. The proposal includes moving the aid rate for school milk into the delegated acts but a number of Member States including the UK, France and Germany strongly objected, commenting that the proposal must not re-open elements of the CAP reform and in particular issues under Article 43(3) TFEU.

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **CAP Reform Delegated Acts**

8. 27 Member States requested an update from the Commission on the preparation of the CAP reform delegated acts. Over half of the Member States intervened and the most frequent concerns were: disproportionate greening penalties; restrictive criteria for some types of Ecological Focus Areas and limited young farmer eligibility. A number of Member States also raised the issue of finding a workable solution to the minimum activity requirement, a key issue Scotland, which we raised with the Commissioner in the margins of Council.

### **European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture**

9. The Commission provided information on the implementation of the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) for Agricultural productivity and sustainability. The EIP for agriculture, which will be implemented through rural development programmes, aims to promote links between all those involved in innovation.

### **34<sup>th</sup> Conference of Directors of EU Paying Agencies**

10. Lithuania presented a report on the conclusions of the conference held under the Lithuanian Presidency in Vilnius on 23-25 October 2013. The conference is held every 6 months in whichever Member State is holding the Presidency and focuses on knowledge exchange.

### **Third Global Conference on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change**

11. The Netherlands informed Council on the outcome of the 3<sup>rd</sup> global conference on agriculture, food security and climate change which was hosted in Johannesburg on 3-5 December 2013. The conference centered on building partnerships and creating a roadmap that will lead to the establishment of an international Alliance on Climate-Smart Agriculture.

### **African Swine Fever**

12. There was widespread support from Member States for measures to stop the spread of African Swine Fever into the EU, after two cases of the disease were identified in Lithuania and one recent case in Poland. Despite these measures Russia has imposed a ban on live pigs and pig products from across the EU. Member States urged the Commission to do all it can to lift the ban. Commissioner Borg confirmed that they would continue to press the Russian Federation.

### **Severe Weather in Slovenia**

13. Slovenia outlined the impact of a recent severe snowstorm on its agriculture and forestry sector and confirmed that they were seeking assistance from the EU's Solidarity Fund.

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14. The next Agriculture and Fisheries Council will be held in Brussels on the 24-25 March.