

**Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform**

Aileen McLeod MSP

T: 0300 244 4000

E: [scottish.ministers@gov.scot](mailto:scottish.ministers@gov.scot)

Rob Gibson MSP  
Convener  
Rural Affairs and Environment Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
EDINBURGH  
EH99 1SP

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Dear Rob

**AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL: 16 NOVEMBER 2015**

This note is to let you know the main outcomes of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council which I attended in Brussels on 16 November 2015, on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment.

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

**AILEEN MCLEOD**

## **AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL REPORT: 16 NOVEMBER 2015**

### **SUMMARY**

Ministers discussed progress on CAP Simplification, the state of play of international trade negotiations with regard to agriculture and food, and the situation of certain markets in follow up to the Council discussion in September.

At the outset of the Council all delegations acknowledged the tragic events in Paris over the weekend, and a 1 minute silence was held at noon (CET).

During the Council, the Minister took the opportunity to meet informally with Welsh Government Minister for Farming and Food, Rebecca Evans. This enabled a useful discussion of Scotland and Wales' shared interests in supporting rural communities.

### **KEY OUTCOMES**

#### **Simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy**

1. The Commissioner presented a stocktaking of progress so far on his priority of simplifying the CAP, he acknowledged that as he'd anticipated in his appointment hearing last year simplifying the CAP was never going to be simple. He outlined progress on the first two 'waves' of simplification that he undertook this year, and announced a third package of simplifications.
2. These were again largely technical simplifications to Delegated and Implementing Acts, few of which would have any immediate impact. In addition he confirmed that the review of the ecological focus areas, including greening, in 2016 would complete in mid-2016. The Commission made clear that he retains an open mind on the opportunities for future action, including if necessary considering changes to the basic act. Member States welcomed efforts so far, although most called for greater ambition there were divided opinions on whether reopening the primary CAP legislation is a good idea.
3. Dr McLeod emphasised the Scottish Government's call for greater ambition and targeted action on simplifications which make a real and practical difference to farmers and administrators.

#### **Market Conditions and Support Measures**

4. Following the measures announced by the Commission in September the Council considered progress on implementation of the aid package and the market conditions in the key affected sectors. The Commissioner confirmed that the necessary Delegated and Implementing Acts to operationalise the package of measures had been adopted, that the distribution of targeted aid in national envelopes is now over to the Member States to implement and that the Market Task Force to consider medium and longer term measures would start and complete its work in 2016.
5. Member States expressed their caution at the positive price signals in some sectors such as dairy, noting that these price signals were not always filtering through to farm gate prices. Some delegations also reiterated that there is a need to consider

future actions to better regulate markets and respond more rapidly to crises. The Scottish Government and the UK Government emphasised the important role that the Market Task Force should play in recommending practical measures to improve transparency and fairness in the supply chain.

## International Agricultural Trade Issues

6. The Council considered an update from the Commission on the forthcoming Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation in December and other complete and ongoing trade negotiations. The Commissioner emphasised the need for trade agreements which constitute an overall balanced package and support the contribution to agriculture and food to economic growth. Many Member States referenced the loss of the Russian market, and the opportunities for opening of new markets elsewhere, while maintaining the high standards for production in the EU and ensuring a level playing field for competition with third country producers.
7. A number of Member States argued the importance of using trade agreements to broaden the protection of EU protected food names. The Presidency committed to continuing to bring these discussions to the Council for Ministerial consideration.

## ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8. Additional agenda items raised by Member States included a Belgian intervention calling for information on addressing the **sanitary embargo by the Russian Federation on pork** products. Commissioner Andriukaitis stressed that the Commission has been working to reopen negotiations with Russian authorities on lifting the embargo. However, any such agreement must be with the EU as a whole, and not in bilateral agreements with individual Member States.
9. The Czech delegation informed the Council as to the outcomes of a conference of directors-general in Prague on **hunting and game management**. The Italian Minister highlighted the difficult situation of their sugar sector ahead of the removal of quotas and called for further support. The Commission emphasized that the abolition of the quota regime is a decision dating from 2005 and significant EU funds have already been targeted at assisting the sector to restructure.
10. Finally the Presidency updated Council on the ongoing trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament on the **revision to the aid schemes for the supply of school milk, fruit and vegetables**. Following the decision of the European Parliament to walk out of trilogues last week the Presidency asked Council whether they would be prepared to be flexible on the legal basis used for parts of the new Regulation. The majority of Member States declined to allow this flexibility as it would mean conceding a Council-only competence to the Parliament.

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11. The next Agriculture and Fisheries Council will be held in Brussels on the 14-15 December 2015.