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Avian Influenza: UK measures endorsed; Member States urged to tighten protection measures against H5N1

A Commission Decision approving the protection, surveillance and buffer zones set up in the UK due to the recent outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Suffolk (see IP/07/134), was endorsed by Member States today. The UK zones will now be added to the Annex of Decision 2006/415/EC^[1]. At the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, the UK delegation gave an update of the action being taken in response to the confirmed outbreak of the virus on a large turkey farm last week.

All 159 000 birds on the UK holding have now been culled and all poultry in the restriction zones have been brought indoors. Movement restrictions have been implemented in the protection and surveillance zones and biosecurity measures have been stepped up. The origin of the virus is still being investigated. Further analysis of samples from the infected turkeys, which is being carried out by the Community Reference Laboratory for Avian Influenza, may help to clarify the source of the outbreak.

The Hungarian delegation also updated the Standing Committee on the situation in Csongrød County, where 2 outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 occurred within 8km of each other at the end of January (see IP/07/97). The Annex of Decision 2006/415/EC has been slightly amended to include new areas which fall into the protection and surveillance zone following the second outbreak.

At today's meeting, the Commission stressed again that, in order to reduce the risk of avian influenza, Member States must maintain heightened surveillance and biosecurity, in conformity with EU measures which have been implemented since 2005 (see IP/05/1284). Member States were asked to review the measures that they currently have in place and advised to keep poultry indoors in identified high risk areas. The Standing Committee also discussed the issue of vaccinating flocks against avian influenza. While this is considered as a possibility in certain circumstances, such as the Dutch and French programmes agreed last year (see IP/06/210), it is not considered feasible to carry out wide-spread vaccination of all poultry flocks at this time. An international conference on vaccination against avian influenza, co-organised by the Commission, will take place in Verona, Italy in March to discuss the issue in more detail.

For more information, see:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/dyna/influenza/index.cfm

For the Defra map of UK restriction zones, see:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/pdf/zones030207.pdf>

^[1] Decision 2006/415/EC concerning certain protection measures in relation to highly pathogenic avian influenza of the subtype H5N1 in poultry in the Community

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