

**Questions and answers on a Commission proposal for a
REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL
amending Regulation (EC) No 1760/2000 as regards electronic identification (EID) of
bovine animals and deleting the provisions on voluntary beef labelling**

What are the benefits of electronic tagging?

Electronic tagging allows individual animal codes to be read directly into a database. It is less error-prone and much faster than data recording by hand. Electronic tagging is therefore an essential tool for automatic reading of individual identities and recording of movements. This means that in the case of an animal disease outbreak, electronic identification provides a clear link to the history of each individual animal allowing quicker and more effective action to be taken to eradicate or prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Apart from the traceability benefits, electronic tagging can also be a very useful tool for on-farm management. In the bovine sector EID is already largely used to ensure records of milk production of individual cows.

Why table a proposal on EID of bovine animals, if the Commission does not wish to make it compulsory and the farmers already have the possibility to identify their animals by EID for their own purposes? Why not leave all this to the farmers' responsibility? Is the Commission not over-regulating this area?

The Commission's proposal intends to recognise EID as an official means of identification. This means that the farmers that use it won't have to comply with the full set of rules on conventional identification which will considerably reduce burden on those farmers.

At the same time, the Commission also intends to ensure harmonisation of the EID technical standards. If this is not done, then each individual farmer could choose different standards (frequencies, etc). This would make it impossible to use EID as an official means to ensure easier traceability (as accompanied by electronic databases, etc.) and to facilitate intra-EU trade. And given that EID is already in use, there is a danger that the development of non-harmonised systems amongst

farmers in different Member States would make it very difficult to harmonise them in the future, if the Commission decided not to act now.

The Commission is now proposing to regulate this issue, so that farmers can derive the maximum benefit of EID in terms of reduction of burden. Indeed, the Commission does not exclude that in the following years proposals to further harmonise EID could be necessary.

Why is the Commission proposing to make EID voluntary for bovine animals, while it is compulsory for sheep and goats?

The EU rules established more than a decade ago on bovine identification and traceability foresaw (and they still foresee) individual identification of each bovine animal by two conventional (plastic) ear-tags. They did not foresee the use of EID as at that time it was not available. In recent years, technological developments have made EID possible. In fact, EID is already used on a voluntary basis by bovine owners as an additional, unofficial means of identification for farm management purposes (feeding, milking, etc.).

The Commission now intends to create a legal framework so that EID is recognised as an official means of identification at EU level. EID may bring considerable savings and reduction of administrative burden for the farmers who adopt it. However, under certain circumstances (small farms, animals kept at free range with infrequent contacts with their owners, etc.), the cost/benefit of the introduction of EID may not be in favour of using this form of identification.

For this reason, the Commission does not propose to make EID compulsory. The Commission also takes into account that a reliable system of identification is already in place, so there is no urgency or necessity for the existing conventional system to be suddenly replaced by EID. At the same time, the Commission proposal foresees that each Member State may establish that EID become compulsory on its national territory. This is because in certain Member States the use of EID has become so common that it may be worth it for them to establish a system of identification and traceability of bovine animals entirely based on EID to ensure they can gain the maximum benefit from its use.

In the sheep and goat sectors, the situation is completely different. Until EID became available there was no obligation for individual identification and traceability, because this was, and still is, technically unfeasible

without EID. Only when EID became available, individual identification and traceability – in conjunction with EID – became compulsory.

Why has the Commission imposed such complex systems of identification and traceability of live animals, that are not in place in third countries?

Well-functioning systems of identification and traceability of live animals are essential for the prevention and control of animal diseases including those affecting humans (zoonoses) and to ensure food safety in the EU internal market. EU legislation on these matters have been in place since the early '90s, when the internal market was established, leading to a major increase in trade in live animals and their products amongst the Member States, with major economic benefits for the farming sector and consumers.

Identification and traceability systems were strengthened in the late '90s and early 2000s following major crises like those on BSE and foot-and-mouth. The existing systems have proved to be very important tools to ensure safe trade in animals and animal products and also consumers' trust. For example, in the case of undesired events in the food chain, such as dioxin contamination, the possibility for the authorities to confirm or exclude that animal products, such as meat or milk, are contaminated with dioxin and to inform the public accordingly can only be based on a good system of animal identification that makes it possible to trace products along the food chain.

Several third countries already have their own good systems of identification and traceability. The EU cannot impose its own internal rules on third countries (and vice-versa!).

Why does the Commission not forbid imports of animals and animal products from third countries not having systems of identification and traceability like the EU ones?

EU rules are risk-based and they make imports possible only from third countries having a satisfactory animal health status. In this regard, imports of live animals into the EU are subject to very stringent rules and in fact the number of live animals imported each year (bovine, sheep & goats, pigs) is low, while export numbers (also thanks to the health

guarantees given, including those on identification and traceability) are much, much higher.

As regards meat, our import conditions are also stringent to ensure that they do not pose the risk of importing disease agents such as FMD. In fact, they sometimes go beyond international standards and foresee - from countries not free from FMD – additional requirements such as deboning and maturation that eventually destroy any FMD virus in the meat.