

Suspected avian influenza in dead wild swans in Greece : Commission takes precautionary measures

The Greek authorities informed the European Commission earlier on 8 February that the National Reference Laboratory in Greece found an avian influenza virus H5 in samples taken from three swans found dead in the Prefectures of Thessaloniki and Pieria. The samples were taken in the framework of the surveillance programme carried out by the Greek authorities on poultry farms and wild birds. Samples are now being dispatched to the Community Reference Laboratory in Weybridge so that further tests can be conducted to establish if this is the H5N1 avian influenza virus found in Asia that has spread to Eastern Europe in recent months. The Commission will adopt today a safeguard measure to ensure increased biosecurity on poultry farms in the concerned areas and improved disease awareness of poultry owners and their families. Movements of poultry from the affected area to other holdings or for slaughter will be subjected to rigorous additional controls. The Commission and Member States have been preparing for the eventuality of avian influenza being detected in wild birds in the EU, so the measure to be adopted tomorrow has been previously discussed in draft form with all Member States. The measure has been finalised in collaboration with the Greek authorities. Community measures are already in place in all Member States to ensure an early detection of the disease, both in domestic and wild birds. Contingency plans are also in place in the Member States to ensure the rapid control and eradication of avian influenza in accordance with Community law, should it occur in poultry farms. Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner Markos Kyprianou said: "We have to work on the assumption that the avian influenza virus could be spread by wild birds, so we should not be unduly surprised or alarmed if such cases are found in the European Union. What is important is that we have the framework in place to take the appropriate measures as soon as possible to contain it and prevent its spread to poultry, and that is what we are doing."