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Report Highlights:

Highlights of the November Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting included scientific advice for managing fish stocks in 2004, the Greenland Fisheries Protocol, identification of ovine and caprine animals, Communication from the Commission on sugar, olive oil, tobacco and cotton, Set-aside, rice market in Portugal, cereals market in the southern EU, the Salzburg Council on Rural Development, and the application of community legislation in acceding countries. Items approved without debate were statistical surveys of milk products, economic accounts for agriculture, plant genetic resources, Codex Alimentarius, the EC-Swiss Confederation Agreement, and marketing standards for eggs.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Brussels USEU [BE2]
[E2]

FISHERIES

Scientific Advice for Managing Fish Stocks in 2004 – Reconstitution of Cod and Northern Hake Stocks

The Council discussed the question of the scientific advice of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on the management of fishery resources in 2004, supplemented by that of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) in connection with the Commission proposals on the reconstitution of Northern hake and cod stocks.

A very large majority of delegations noted, in the light of recent scientific opinion, that stocks of these species were seriously depleted and that a multiannual solution was needed to remedy the situation. Some delegations wanted a detailed analysis of the stock situation of specific species.

Some delegations supported the aims of the proposal for the reconstitution of cod stocks, with a fishing effort limitation scheme based on kW/days, with a view to adoption at a forthcoming meeting.

Several delegations would prefer to extend the current Annex XVII to the TAC and quotas Regulation by adjusting the allocation and number of days spent at sea as well as the fishing zones concerned. This annex introduces a system, which limits the fishing effort in terms of the number of days absent from port to allow certain cod stocks to reconstitute.

Greenland – Provisional Application of the Fisheries Protocol

The Council reached unanimous political agreement on the Provisional Application of the Fisheries Protocol between the European Economic Community, Denmark and the Local Government of Greenland. The Council agreed to adopt the text formally as an "A" item at a forthcoming meeting once the United Kingdom delegation had withdrawn its parliamentary scrutiny reservation.

Under Community law Greenland forms part of the "overseas countries and territories" (Article 188 of the Treaty), and withdrew from the EEC in 1985. The Fisheries Agreement provides for catch quotas in Greenland waters for the Community and gives priority to supplementary catch possibilities in return for payment of financial compensation.

The aspects of provisional application cover solely experimental fisheries and the budgetary assistance program.

AGRICULTURE

Official Controls

The Council held a policy debate on the questions of fees and sanctions in relation to 14723/03. It instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to continue examining all outstanding questions so that the Presidency could submit an overall compromise on this dossier at its next meeting in December.

A large majority of delegations welcomed the compromise solution making the levying of fees mandatory for "veterinary" controls and optional for other foods and feed as well as the option open to Member States of imposing proportionate sanctions within the sphere of the first pillar.

The Commission's ambition is to create a horizontal legal basis for all food chain controls in accordance with its policy in the White Paper on Food Safety.

As an adjunct to the food hygiene package which lays down the rules, controls and responsibilities for the agri-foodstuffs sector, this proposal defines the tasks and responsibilities of the competent authorities in respect of controls carried out on the food chain at every stage of production from farm to table.

The proposal covers numerous aspects such as controls at border inspection posts, the prerogatives of the Food and Veterinary Office, and the tasks assigned to national and Community reference laboratories.

It provides for inspection and Community audit systems, both in Member States and in third countries, to check those national surveillance systems referred to in annual and multiannual plans transmitted to the Commission are operating efficiently.

Identification of ovine and caprine animals

The Council took note of the progress of work (14136/03) on the proposal for a Regulation establishing a system for the identification and registration of ovine and caprine animals and of the Commission representative's comments and agreed to re-examine this dossier in December, once the European Parliament's opinion was available, with a view to adopting the Regulation under this item on the agenda.

Communication from the Commission – sugar, olive oil, tobacco, cotton

The Council held a preliminary exchange of views on the sugar and tobacco sectors and continued its discussions on cotton and olive oil on the basis of the Commission communication.

The Council instructed the Special Committee on Agriculture to examine the legislative proposals on tobacco, olive oil and cotton as soon as they were available and to continue examining the different options advocated for sugar.

Set-aside

The Commission representative presented to the Council the Commission's proposal to reduce from 10% to 5% the required set-aside rate for cereals production in the 2004/05 marketing year for which farmers will qualify between 15 January and 31 August 2004. This measure, which should be adopted at the next Council meeting, is intended to offset the effects of the drought in Europe, which principally led to a serious reduction in European Community cereals stocks, which dropped from 209 million tonnes in 2002 to 184 million tonnes. He emphasized that the European Parliament would have to deliver its opinion as soon as possible if the proposal was to be adopted before the start of 2004.

France, Finland, Italy and Portugal welcomed this proposal and agreed that it needed to be adopted speedily. The Presidency agreed to forward this proposal to the Special Committee on Agriculture for examination at the earliest opportunity.

Rice market in Portugal

The Portuguese delegation wished to point out to the Council and the Commission that the situation of the rice market in Portugal had deteriorated since the reform of the Common

Agricultural Policy (CAP) was adopted in June 2003. It said that the purchase price of rice on the Portuguese market was markedly lower than the intervention price, because producers feared there would be a 50% reduction in the intervention price once the reform entered into force.

The Commission representative said that the market prices for paddy rice did not reflect distortion of the market. He emphasized that a change in the maximum ceiling for quantities for intervention, currently fixed at 100 000 tonnes, would be justified solely on the basis of accurate data provided by each Member State.

Cereals market in the southern European Union

The Spanish delegation, supported by the French and Polish delegations, wished to draw the attention of the Council and the Commission to the cereals market situation in the countries of southern Europe, pointing to the very negative stock situation resulting from the climate conditions of last summer (14798/03). It requested that German rye stocks (approximately 4 million tonnes) be put on the market at a price close to the intervention price, with the possibility of funding for the cost of transport to the southern European countries.

The German and Finnish delegations said they were open to putting surplus rye stocks on the market.

The Commission representative said that the Commission intended to continue disposing of Community rye stocks but ruled out the possibility of Community funding for transport costs.

Salzburg Conference on Rural Development

The Commission representative briefed the Council on the results of the second Conference on Rural Development held in Salzburg from 12 to 14 November 2003.

The Conference launched a wide-ranging debate on the experience gained from implementing the current generation of rural development programs over the period 2000-2006, noted the lessons to be learned and drew the necessary conclusions for the next generation for the period 2007-2013

Application of community legislation in acceding countries

With the Presidency's agreement and off the meeting agenda, the Slovak delegation, supported by the Slovenian, Polish, Czech, Latvian, Lithuanian, Netherlands, French, German and Austrian delegations, wanted more flexible management of the list of products covered by Commission Regulation (EC) No 1972/200 on transitional measures to be adopted in respect of trade in agricultural products of the acceding countries. This Regulation provides in particular for a list of stocks of products that are surplus at 1 May 2004 on which the new Member States should levy charges to ensure that these products do not qualify for a double export refund, before 1 May 2004 if originating in the European Union of 15 Member States and after 1 May 2004, the date of enlargement, if exported from a new Member State. Most delegations from the acceding countries have underlined the administrative burden and extra cost involved in managing this list of surplus stocks.

ITEMS APPROVED WITHOUT DEBATE AGRICULTURE

Agricultural statistics – Milk – Public deliberation

The Council adopted a Directive amending the Directive on statistical surveys of milk and milk products, as contained in PE-CONS 3663/03. The Directive amends Directive 96/16/EC, the aim of which is to provide reliable and comparable data on milk production and use and reliable, regular, short-term information on milk deliveries to undertakings which treat or process milk and on the production of milk products in the Member States.

The principal amendments introduced by this Directive, which Member States must comply with by 31 March 2004, is the introduction of statistical information on the protein content of milk, in view of the growing economic importance of the protein content of milk.

Economic accounts for agriculture – Public deliberation

The Council adopted a Regulation on the economic accounts for agriculture, as contained in PE-CONS 3664/03. The Regulation introduces a common methodology for economic accounts for agriculture for the Community's requirements. It incorporates principally the General Industrial Classification of Economic Activities within the European Communities (NACE) as the principal codification tool and defines the income indicators for the agriculture sector.

Plant genetic resources – Council conclusions

The Council adopted the conclusions on the urgency of ratification by the Member States of the European Community (EC) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (14340/03).

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) was adopted on 3 November 2001 by the 31st FAO Ministerial Conference. The EC and its Member States simultaneously signed the ITPGRFA in June 2002. The Treaty enters into force 90 days after the deposit of the fortieth of the instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession that 32 States have already deposited. Member States are therefore asked to speed up their ratification procedures to enable the Treaty to enter into force.

Codex Alimentarius

The Council adopted the Decision on the accession of the European Community to the Codex Alimentarius Commission (13089/03 + 13073/03 ADD 1 +ADD 2).

The object of the Codex Alimentarius Commission is inter alia to develop and harmonize world-wide health standards and to issue guidelines and recommendations on agricultural and fishery products, foodstuffs, food additives and contaminants, feedstuffs, veterinary drugs, pesticides, including labeling, methods of analysis and sampling, codes of ethics and good agricultural practice and guidelines of hygiene practice, with a view to protecting consumer health and ensuring fair practices in international trade.

EC-Swiss Confederation Agreement

The Council adopted amendments 13340/03 and 13567/03, which involve taking account of measures to combat bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) adopted since 2002 by the Community and Switzerland and the evolution of that disease, to include the Community and Swiss legislation on BSE and the detailed rules and arrangements for implementing that legislation as regards trade in live bovine animals, their semen, ova and embryos.

Eggs – marketing standards

The Council adopted by qualified majority, with the United Kingdom delegation abstaining, a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EEC) No 1907/90 on certain marketing standards for eggs (14070/03 + 14087/03 ADD 1). The main changes to the initial proposal concern the date of implementation of the Regulation for eggs sold by the producer on a local public market (small producers), which is 1 July 2005, although the general rule is 1 January 2004. These eggs (category A and washed eggs) are identified by a distinctive producer number, which allows the farming method to be identified. The proposal as last amended by the Special Committee on Agriculture on 27 October 2003 gives packing centers which washed eggs before 1 June 2003 the possibility to market those eggs throughout all parts of the Community where Member States give their authorization. These eggs are classified as "washed eggs". The text authorizes the export of chilled eggs to the French overseas departments taking account of the duration of transport exceeding 21 days.

(Information contained in this report was transcribed from the Official Minutes of the 2542nd Agriculture and Fisheries Meeting of the European Commission)

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