

Brussels, 29 June 2007

Short-sighted Ministers Agree Suffering of Meat Chickens Should Continue

Eurogroup for Animals deeply regrets that the text of the Broilers Directive adopted by EU Member States at the 28th June Environment Council sacrifices important welfare measures to misguided and short-term economic interests.

In adopting stocking density limits ranging from 33kg/m² to 39 and even 42kg/m² under some conditions, the Council has yielded to pressure from a small coalition of countries led by France, Poland and the Czech Republic. After 18 months of obstructive negotiating, those Member States have seriously watered down the Commission proposal.

Eurogroup for Animals deplores that those countries imposed their support for highly intensive farming against the views of more progressive states. Even during the closing stages of negotiations, both Austria and the Netherlands expressed their disappointment that the principles of animal welfare had not been sufficiently taken into account in the final text. The decision also ignores calls from the Commission, the European Parliament, consumers and an increasing number of farmers who look to the EU to show global leadership in tackling the appalling suffering caused by the factory farming of Europe's most popular meat.

Bred with an explosive growth rate that their bodies cannot support, then housed in overcrowded sheds, most birds cannot walk properly and many suffer heart related problems. Build up of ammonium from their faeces causes skin burns which frequently become infected. The hundreds of thousands of birds that collapse and die every day are considered a normal 'cost of production'.

Many observers see the decision as a missed business opportunity. Dil Peeling, Senior Policy Officer at Eurogroup for Animals explains: "*The market for free range eggs is booming across Europe and those same consumers have clearly said they want to buy table chickens that have had a better life. They will be dismayed to find this European law will allow birds raised for meat to be given less space than a laying hen gets in a battery cage.*"

"*There are no winners from this agreement*" adds Peeling, "*Certainly not the chickens that will continue to suffer. And certainly not the European chicken producers whose old business model of 'pack them tight – sell them cheap' continues to collapse in the face of imports from countries that simply do it cheaper.*"

Commission predictions are that Europe will shift from being a net exporter of chicken meat to being a net importer by 2013. Eurogroup will not hesitate to ask concerned consumers only to buy welfare friendly chickens even if they are produced outside the EU.

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Eurogroup webpage on meat chickens: http://www.eurogroupforanimals.org/policy/meat_chickens.htm