

(2004/C 112/25)

On 27 February 2004 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 37 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

On 24 February 2004, the Bureau of the European Economic and Social Committee instructed the Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment to prepare the Committee’s work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, at its 407th plenary session of 31 March and 1 April 2004 (meeting of 31 March 2004), the European Economic and Social Committee appointed Mr Donnelly as rapporteur-general and adopted the following opinion unanimously.

1. Introduction

1.1 In 2000 the Commission announced a radical shake-up of food hygiene legislation with the publication of the White Paper on Food Safety. The key aspects of this reform were the simplification of legislation in the area of food and feed safety and in the area of animal health that relates to food safety.

1.2 The objectives of the White Paper were to be achieved through the implementation of a very comprehensive action programme. This included the Proposal for setting up the European Food Safety Authority and a Proposal for a regulation on General Food Law. This objective has been achieved in the form of Regulation (EC) No. 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down general principles and requirements of food law establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of Food Safety.

1.3 The actions in the area of the simplification of food and feed law and the reforms in the area of official controls are in an advanced state. These should be formally implemented by Member States by 1 January 2006. The seamless integration of the hygiene rules and of the official controls, from farm to fork was also a key objective. This is reflected in the proposals.

1.4 The animal-health requirements for the importation of meat and meat products have been recast and updated by Council Directive 2002/99/EC. This must be formally implemented by Member States by 1 January 2005.

1.5 The recent outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) and also classical swine fever (CSF) have also prompted a recast of animal-health legislation relating to the import of live animals. This has already been sent to the Council for a Directive laying down animal-health rules for the importation into the Community of certain live animal, and amending Directives 90/426/EEC and 92/65/EEC (COM (2003) 570).

It is therefore proposed to repeal Directive 72/462/EEC with regard to animal-health conditions for live animals, as it is no longer relevant.

2. Gist of Commission Proposal

2.1 This proposal repeals Directive 72/462/EEC from 1 January 2005 as regard the animal-health rules for the importation of meat and meat products.

2.2 From 1 January 2006 the proposal repeals Directive 72/462/EEC as it relates to rules on public health and official controls for meat and meat products.

2.3 A date has yet to be agreed depending on the formal date of implementation on the proposal for a Council Directive laying down animal-health rules for the importation of certain live animals and amending Directives 90/426/EEC and 92/65/EEC. As from this date to be agreed Directive 72/462/EEC is repealed as regard the animal-health rules for the importation of live animals.
2.4 The implementing rules established under Decisions adopted for the import of live animals, meat and meat products under Directive 72/462, as listed in the Annex to this proposal will remain in force until they are replaced by measures adopted under the new regulatory framework.

3. General comments

3.1 The EESC welcomes this proposal as part of the ongoing review of Community measures in matters relating to animal health. The EESC supports the concept of consolidating the rules governing the imports of live animals.

3.2 The EESC is also very much in favour of the ongoing process of simplification of Community legislation.

3.3 The EESC welcomes the rapid progress made in the implementation of the action plans on Food Safety through the implementation of the objectives set out in the White Paper on Food Safety.

3.4 The EESC finally welcomes the clear separation of the rules governing animal health requirements for the importation of meat and meat products, on public health rules in food and feed hygiene, on official controls of food and feed and on animal-health rules for the importation of live animals.

4. Specific comments

4.1 The EESC recognises the potential risks in the area of animal health particularly as a consequence of the new borders the EU will have after the enlargement; the EESC therefore recommends that sufficient resources are made available by the Commission for the inspection and auditing of the implementation and transposition of the relevant Directives.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The EESC supports the Commission’s proposal, in the interests of completion of the process of legislative review and simplification.

Brussels, 31 March 2004

The President

of the European Economic and Social Committee

Roger BRIESCH