

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2000/75/EC as regards vaccination against bluetongue'

COM(2010) 666 final — 2010/0326 (COD)

(2011/C 132/18)

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On 26 January 2011, the Council of the European Union decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 43(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2000/75/EC as regards vaccination against bluetongue

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The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 28 February 2011.

At its 470th plenary session, held on 15 and 16 March 2011 (meeting of 15 March), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 185 votes to two with 12 abstentions.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The Committee recommends also amending for the same purpose Commission Regulation (EC) No 1266/2007 of 26 October 2007 on the implementing provisions to Council Regulation 2000/75/EC regarding the rules for the control, monitoring, surveillance and restrictions on movements of certain species of animals that are susceptible to bluetongue.

1.2 The Committee draws attention to the situation which arose when vaccinations against foot-and-mouth disease and classical swine fever were halted. One of the main arguments used at the time was that eradicating sporadic outbreaks would be less costly than vaccination.

1.3 The Committee considers it important to highlight the option of leaving this matter to the discretion of each individual Member State, as the epidemic situation in regions with a temperate climate is different to that in Mediterranean regions, as are the types of bluetongue in these regions. Those countries that decide not to vaccinate have a better chance of detecting the disease. This approach is not risk-free, however, because exotic new strains of the disease from Asia will be more difficult to detect.

1.4 The Committee is of the opinion that the amended Directive has fully taken on board the latest technological developments regarding the production of vaccines which can also be successfully used outside areas subject to animal movement restrictions. The proposed amendment to the Directive includes an assurance that it will not increase the administrative burden for the Member States, except for information regarding the introduction of a vaccination programme. No significant

social impact is expected. The Committee fully endorses this objective and welcomes the proposal based on this assurance.

2. Introduction and gist of the Communication

2.1 The purpose of the proposed Council directive is to amend the rules on vaccination currently laid down in Directive 2000/75/EC, to make them more flexible, taking into account the fact that inactivated vaccines are now available, which can also be successfully used outside areas subject to animal movement restrictions.

2.2 The Commission considers that the amendment of the legislation is necessary to reflect the technological progress in the field of vaccine development. The proposed amendment will facilitate decision-making on bluetongue control strategies on the basis of the specific situation within the Member States without unnecessary intervention by the Union.

2.3 It is now widely agreed that vaccination with inactivated vaccines is the preferred tool for bluetongue control and prevention of clinical disease in the EU. Their use renders the current obstacles to preventive vaccination outside areas subject to animal movement restrictions unnecessary.

3. Comments

3.1 In the past three years modern inactivated vaccines against bluetongue have become available which could be safely used outside restricted zones. This will allow the Member States to develop their own national strategies on the prevention and control of the disease without the intervention of the Union.

3.2 The proposal is expected to reduce the adverse economic and social impact by increasing the number of options available to control the disease. Nonetheless, it is difficult to quantify these benefits precisely, as they will depend on the unpredictable nature of the evolution of the disease in Europe, which is no longer an exotic occurrence in Europe.

3.3 The proposal does not have an effect on existing control measures for the disease. The proposal will not, therefore, have a direct impact on the EU annual and multi annual programmes

for the eradication, control and monitoring of certain animal diseases.

3.4 By allowing the wide use of vaccination in the Union, this proposal has the potential to reduce the negative economic impact of bluetongue caused by both direct and indirect losses resulting from this disease.

3.5 The proposal will allow a wider use of vaccination and a potential increased market for the pharmaceutical companies who produce the inactivated vaccines against bluetongue.

Brussels, 15 March 2011.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Staffan NILSSON
