



Brussels, 15 February 2008

**Background Note <sup>1</sup>**  
**AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL**  
**Brussels, 18 February 2008**

*The Council will be chaired by Mr Iztok JARC, Slovenian Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food.*

*The Council will meet from 15.00 on Monday 18 February and will first be invited to state its position on five proposals for decisions concerning the authorisation for placing on the market four varieties of **genetically modified maize and one variety of potato (GMOs)**. This item falls within the remit of the Coreper.*

*The Council will hold a policy debate on the “**Health Check**” of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).*

*Under part "A" item, the Council will adopt Council conclusions on fisheries partnership agreement with Mauritania.*

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*The Presidency will hold press conferences at the end of the session [+/- 19.00].*

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*Proceedings open to the public can be followed via video streaming:  
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/videostreaming>*

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*Other events in the margins of the Council:*

*Monday, 18 February, 10.00: Informal Session of Fisheries Ministers: Discussion on the Reform of the Community Fisheries Control Policy, chaired by Iztok Jarc, Slovenian Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Sofitel EU Hotel (Brussels)<sup>2</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> This Note was prepared under the sole responsibility of the Press Office.

<sup>2</sup> The Presidency will hold press conferences at 14h00 in Sofitel; More information on [www.eu2008.si](http://www.eu2008.si).

## AGRICULTURE

### GMOs

The Council will be invited to act by the qualified majority on five proposals for decisions on the authorisation for placing on the market of four varieties of genetically modified maize – variety MON863xNK603 ([16782/07](#)), variety MON863xMON810 ([16783/07](#)), variety MON863xMON810xNK603 ([16784/07](#)), and variety GA21 ([5946/08](#)) - and a potato variety EH92-527-1 ([16785/07](#)).

At this stage, it is not yet known whether the Council will by qualified majority support or oppose the proposals. If the Council would not act by a qualified majority the proposals will be referred back to the Commission.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) issued favourable opinions on all five GMOs and concluded that it is unlikely that the placing on the market of the products containing, consisting of, or produced from the maize/potato concerned as described in the respective applications will have adverse effects on human or animal health or the environment.

In October and December 2007 respectively, the Commission consulted the relevant Regulatory Committee<sup>3</sup>, which did not deliver its opinion with the required qualified majority.

Consequently in accordance with the Council decision 1999/468/EC, on 18 December 2007 and 1st February<sup>4</sup> 2008 respectively, the Commission submitted the five proposals to the Council, which must act by a qualified majority within three months of the date of submission.

### Health Check

The Council will hold a *policy debate* on the communication on the "health check" of the CAP since its 2003 reform ([15351/07](#)).

The discussion will be framed by the following Presidency's questionnaire which intends to focus on certain items raised by delegations during their previous exchange of views on that issue<sup>5</sup>, in particular at the level of the Special Committee on Agriculture:

1. *What are the three main priorities for your delegation in the Health Check exercise?*
2. *With the expiry of the milk quota regime in 2015, what measures are a necessary part of the soft landing scenario?*

The Presidency intends to draw Council conclusions in March in order to allow the Commission to come back with legislative proposals in May for their detailed discussion in the second half of 2008.

The European Parliament is drafting an own-initiative report on the Commission's communication which should be adopted in March (*Rapporteur Lutz Goepel*).

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<sup>3</sup> Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH).

<sup>4</sup> for maize *GA21*

<sup>5</sup> See Council Press release of 26 November 2007 ([15333/07](#)) and of 21 January 2008 ([5509/08](#))

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **a) Drought – Request from the Cypriot delegation**

The Cypriot delegation will draw Council's attention on the gravity of the agricultural situation in Cyprus following the drought of the last past months in the Mediterranean area (6302/08).

### **(b) Critical situation on the pork market - Request from the German delegation**

The German delegation will inform the Council on the critical situation on the pork market due to the increase of production costs, despite several market measures in place (private storage aid) (6392/08).

### **(c) Trade in illegal timber in relation with CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) - Request from the Dutch delegation**

The Dutch delegation will express its concerns with regard to illegal timber in relation with CITES (6503/08).

In December 2007, the Council noted the Netherlands' request for a report to be drawn up without delay on the possible legal options for implementing the FLEGT Action Plan.

### **(d) Bluetongue: Community funding of vaccination - Request from the Dutch delegation**

The Dutch delegation will raise the issue of the availability of a vaccine and the Community financial resources that could be put towards a mass bluetongue vaccination programme (6460/08).

### **(e) Bluetongue: economic damage - Request from the Belgian delegation**

The Belgian delegation will inform the Council of the economic damage caused by bluetongue (6462/08).

### **(f) Eligibility criteria for the bovine slaughter premium - request from the Swedish delegation**

The Swedish delegation will reiterate its request to find the appropriate solution with regard to a court ruling<sup>6</sup> interpreting a delay in the notification of the birth of a bovine animal as rendering that animal ineligible for the slaughter premium (6509/08).

### **g) WTO negotiations on the Doha programme for development – information from the Commission**

Commissioner Fischer Boel will report to the Council on the state of play of the agricultural strand of the WTO negotiations<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Judgment of the Court C/45 of 24 May 2007, Maatschap Schonewille-Prins v. Minister van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit.

<sup>7</sup> for last document from WTO Agriculture Committee Chair Crawford Falconer circulated on 8 February see [http://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/agric\\_e/chair\\_texts08\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/chair_texts08_e.htm)