25th June 2014

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL: 16-17 June 2014

I am writing to provide you with a report on the main outcomes of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting, held in Luxembourg on the 16-17 June 2014.

I am copying this letter to the Convener of the European and External Relations Committee, for information.

RICHARD LOCHHEAD
AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL REPORT: 16-17 June 2014

SUMMARY

Agriculture

The Council adopted conclusions on the Commission’s report on the 2007 reform of the fruit and vegetable sector. The Presidency failed to reach a qualified majority to adopt a ‘soft landing’ approach for the EU dairy sector after the milk quota system ends in 2015 (a quota increase for 2014-2015 to limit potential fines). The Council also adopted conclusions on the proposals for the school fruit, vegetable and milk schemes and hope to enter into negotiations with the European Parliament in the Autumn to conclude the dossier. An Informal lunch was held with US Secretary of Agriculture to discuss progress on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

Fisheries

The Council agreed their position on the “Omnibus” Regulation, an interim measure for implementing the landing obligation from 1 January 2015. It is hoped a deal can now be reached quickly with the European Parliament to finalise the regulation by the end of the year. The Commission noted update reports from the regional groups on their progress of agreeing fisheries discard plans.

KEY OUTCOMES

Future of the Dairy Sector

- The Council failed to adopted conclusions on the future management of the dairy sector. The point of disagreement concerned adjustment to the butterfat coefficient. Future decision on the dairy sector will be taken forward by the next Presidency.

School Milk and Fruit Schemes

- The Council showed support for the Commission’s legislative proposals for reform of the school milk and fruit schemes. Commissioner (Ciolos) expressed his gratitude for the progress made by the Greek Presidency.

Fruit and Vegetable Sector – Council Conclusions

- The Council agreed conclusions on the Commission’s report on the fruit and vegetable sector. Commissioner (Ciolos) declared they would review the regulatory framework by 31 December 2018.

CAP Implementation

- Ministers exchanged information on how they intend to implement the CAP at national and regional level. By the 1 August 2014 member states have to notify the Commission of their decisions on key elements of the CAP direct payments regulation.

Omnibus Regulation on Implementing the Landing Obligation

- The Presidency briefed Ministers on the agreed Council position on the “Omnibus” Regulation, which the Commission proposed in order to facilitate the introduction of the landing obligation from 1 January 2015. Work will begin soon with the European Parliament to complete the regulation by the end of the year, but Commissioner (Borg) pointed out work has to continue to progress on the overhaul of the full technical measure regulations.
Implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy: Discard Plans

- At the request of the Presidency, Ministers from the member states currently chairing the regional groups provided an update on preparations of the discard plans. Whilst there was wide agreement amongst member states of the value of regionalisation, some member states, including the UK, highlighted the need for consistency and a level playing field between regions. The Commission welcomed the news that joint recommendations were near completion (end of June deadline) at which point the Commission could work on preparing the delegated acts to turn the plans into EU law.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Informal Lunch with US Secretary of Agriculture

- EU Ministers met with Tom Vilsack, US Secretary of Agriculture to discuss progress on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Ministers raised concerns over the protection of Geographical Indications, with Vilsack warning against the EU trying to protect generic names. The next round of TTIP talks are scheduled for the 14-18 July.

Country of Origin Labeling for Meat

- The Commission informed the Council about the European Parliament’s resolution for the application of mandatory indication of the country of origin for fresh, chilled and frozen meat of swine, sheep and poultry. The majority of member states supported the Commission’s position to reject this resolution on the grounds that the added value would be outweighed by the costs of implementation.

Smarter Rules for Safer Food

- Progress on the package of measures to simplify and streamline the existing legislation covering animal and plant health was discussed and focused on import controls, with member states split between an ‘open’ and ‘closed’ system. The proposal on the EU plant reproductive material regime was rejected at first reading by the European Parliament but the Commission has gathered views from member states on a revised new architecture for the regulation.

Antibiotic Microbial Resistance

- The Swedish and Danish delegations asked the Commission to provide an update on the 2011 Action Plan on the responsible use of antimicrobials in animal husbandry. Commissioner (Borg) commented that it was a high priority issue for the Commission and a full progress report would be published by the end of the year.

Management of Capelin – State of play

- Denmark, supported by Sweden, briefed the Council on the need for a swift establishment of total allowable catch (TAC) for capelin due to the short lived season of this fish stock. The Commission responded that they had now received the offer of capelin from Greenland which would allow them to adopt the proposal straightaway.

The next Agriculture and Fisheries Council and the first for the new Italian Presidency will be held in Brussels on 14 July 2014.