

Brussels, 20 October 2005

## **Avian influenza: further preventive measures agreed and Russian import restrictions adopted**

*Member States have endorsed three Commission decisions aimed at further reducing the threat of avian influenza, within the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCFCAH) today. The decisions relate to further biosecurity measures for domestic flocks, preventive vaccination of zoo birds and an extension of the Russian import ban. The Standing Committee also issued a statement, which is annexed below, and took note of the situation in Greece.*

### **Additional risk mitigation measures for areas of particular risk**

The Standing Committee voted in favour of a draft Commission decision to restrict keeping poultry outdoor in areas of particular risk of avian influenza. Member States are responsible for defining the risk areas, on the basis of common EU risk factors agreed last week (see IP/05/1284). The restriction should ensure that wild birds have no contact with feed and water destined for poultry.. The draft decision also restricts the use of certain decoy birds. Member States are required to inform the Commission and SCFCAH of the measures taken by 5 November.

The Standing Committee also agreed on an immediate, EU-wide ban on the collection of birds on markets, shows, exhibitions and cultural events, unless specifically authorised by Member State authorities on the basis of a positive risk assessment.

### **Protection and vaccination of zoo birds**

The Standing Committee approved a draft Commission decision that provides for additional bio security measures to protect birds kept in zoos . Member States may also make recourse to vaccination, if deemed appropriate. Member States are required to provide details of the implementation of these measures to the Commission by 30 November, and present a programme on the vaccination of birds kept in zoos to SCFCAH. All vaccinated birds must be identified and recorded, and trade in these birds will be prohibited except under specific authorisation. SCFCAH will review the decision in early December.

### **Import restrictions on Russia**

Following confirmation from Russia yesterday of an outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza in Tula (south of Moscow), the Standing Committee backed a draft Commission decision to ban all imports of live pet birds and unprocessed feathers from the European part of Russia.

The only areas to which the ban will not apply are Kaliningrad\* and some regions on the border of Finland. The decision extends the embargo on imports from the Russian regions east of the Ural Mountains, which has been in place since 8 September. No ban is necessary for eggs, poultry meat or meat products, as there is no trade between Russia and the EU in these products. The Decision has been adopted by the Commission this evening.

\*Kaliningrad Oblast, Leningrad Oblast, Karelia Republic, Murmansk Oblast, St Petersburg (federal city)

### **Situation in Greece**

The Committee also stated that it was following closely the situation of a suspicion of avian influenza in Greece and noted that so far the presence of the virus has not been confirmed. Further tests on samples are currently being carried out.

### **The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health made the following statement on 20.10.2005:**

"The Standing Committee has today examined the situation in relation to the situation of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) strain H5N1, in particular with regard to the recent developments in Turkey, Romania and Russia. The Standing Committee is following closely the situation in Greece, for which the last information available does not indicate presence of the AI virus.

Clear distinction must be made between Avian influenza recently detected in poultry in Turkey, Romania and Russia, Avian influenza sporadically affecting humans, normal seasonal human influenza, and a possible risk for an influenza pandemic.

The committee agreed a Decision requiring Member states to assess the risk of H5N1 being introduced to poultry holdings. Appropriate measures must then be taken to prevent contact between wild and domestic species as far as it is practicable to do so. Systems for early detection and prompt reporting of AI should be in place. Additional risk mitigation measures, including, when appropriate, restrictions on keeping poultry in open-air in areas of particular risk of AI, have been agreed.

Recent information from the outbreaks of AI this week in East Europe (Romania, Turkey and Russia) suggests that the disease remains confined to poultry and wild birds and at this stage no human cases have been confirmed, therefore at present AI does not represent a risk to the general public. The ECDC considers that the public is far less likely to be exposed in Europe than in Central Asia and the Far East because of the generally greater separation of humans and commercially kept birds in Europe. Occupational health guidance to protect those working with infected birds has been prepared by a number of countries and European level guidance is being prepared by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

In the EU, surveillance in order to rapidly identify a possible introduction of the infection and biosecurity measures at poultry farms have been strengthened. In addition, the Commission, Member States and experts are assessing the available information on relevant migratory bird species. Furthermore, the positive experience from the 2003 epidemics in the EU showed that Community rules, and in particular the contingency plans, that are reviewed and tested periodically, are effective tools for controlling outbreaks of AI. Rules on imports from third countries that are continuously updated (e.g. Russia) play an essential role in the protection of the EU. Provisions on preventive measures for birds kept in zoos have also been agreed and may include vaccination if appropriate.

Likewise, control on imports at Community borders are being reinforced and special attention is paid to prevent illegal introduction of live birds and poultry products that might pose a risk for AI virus introduction. Nevertheless, there is a general ban for introduction of products of animal origin for personal consumption.

Consumers in Europe are currently concerned on the safety of poultry products such as meat. On this matter WHO states the following “WHO does not at present conclude that any processed poultry products (whole refrigerated or frozen carcasses and products derived from these) and eggs in or arriving from areas currently experiencing outbreaks of avian influenza H5N1 in poultry pose a risk to public health.” In addition, imports of poultry products such as eggs and meat from the affected areas are banned for animal health reasons. Consumers can thus be reassured.

Outdoor activities that bring people into contact with wild birds, such as hunting and ornithology, need not be restricted at present in the EU. Normal hygiene measures after handling dead birds should be followed (hand washing, safe food preparation etc). Particular attention should be paid to reporting to the authorities any mass change in the behaviour of wild birds so as to identify diseased birds. Similarly hunters and other environmental agents and members of the general public are requested to contact the authorities should any abnormal mortality of wild birds be detected. People collecting such dead birds should know the importance of and the need to adhere to proper use of hand hygiene after the contact with them, use of gloves and cleaning and disinfection.

In the event the disease is confirmed or suspected in an area, the role of bird hunting in the dispersion of wild birds and possible further spread of the disease should be assessed and appropriate measures should consequently be taken in the area. Specific restrictive measures have been taken for the possible role of decoy birds used by hunters in transmitting as well as detecting the infection. In addition to the existing prohibition of introduction in the EU, trade and non-commercial movements within the Community by hunters of dead specimens of wild birds, and in particular waterfowl, should be strongly discouraged..

The Member States acknowledge and highly appreciate the coordination done by the Commission services working during these recent events in close cooperation with all Member States’ veterinary animal health, public health and wildlife services.”