



MEDIA RELEASE

Latest proposals for CAP reform fail the environment

Brussels, Tuesday, November 20th – The Commission’s plans for the Common Agricultural Policy “Health Check”[1] fail to address the challenges of biodiversity decline, mounting climate change and a gathering water crisis.

BirdLife International [2], the global alliance of conservation organisations working in all 27 EU countries, hoped that the Commission would use the Health Check to outline a long-term sustainable vision for European farming and land management. Whilst it acknowledges the environmental challenges farming faces, very little is proposed to address them.

BirdLife have analysed the Commission’s Health Check proposals and given a rating for the key issues [3]. The failure to address the loss of set-aside, which will have serious impacts on wildlife and the environment, scores the lowest.

Ariel Brunner, Agriculture Policy Officer, said: “The European countryside is facing unprecedented challenges, but their proposals do not offer solutions”.

“Most devastating for the environment is the proposed abolition of set aside, which will severely damage wildlife and water quality precisely at the time when climate change is adding further pressure on already weakened ecosystems”.

Despite recent reforms, the CAP is still failing the environment [4], delivering too little funding to sustainable farming and wasting much of its budget on untargeted subsidies that are mostly pocketed by the most intensive farming enterprises.

“The Commission is hiding its head in the sand and ignoring the challenges that climate change and biodiversity decline pose to the CAP. It is actually a myth that ostriches behave in this way, and decision-makers shouldn’t either”.

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Notes for Editors:

[1] The “Health Check” was promised when the CAP was reformed in 2003. Further reform is likely when the EU budget is reviewed in 2009. A period of consultation now follows with a final proposal likely in spring. Reforms will be adopted in about one year’s time.

[2] BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries and territories. BirdLife is the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and the problems affecting them. For more information about the work of the BirdLife European Division click here: <http://europe.birdlife.org>

[3] BirdLife International’s scoring of the Commission’s CAP ‘Health check’ Green paper on the ground monitors how well it addresses environmental challenges like biodiversity decline, accelerating climate change and looming water crisis.

Rating system:

Five stars- Ambitious and well thought of proposals highly likely to deliver positive outcome.

One star- Exceedingly weak or misguided proposal, highly likely to fail in delivering any environmental improvements.

No stars- An actual step back, a likely negative outcome aggravating existing environmental crises.

Set-aside

Green rating - no stars

Set-aside – obligation to leave small pockets of non cropped land is being abolished despite its incidental benefits to wildlife and water. The Health check promises only to review replacement measures but suggests these will only be voluntary. The EU is just three years away from missing its objective of halting biodiversity decline and climate change is forcing species to move in search of new habitats. European farmland desperately needs more environmental quality but is likely to get even less than the present level.

Environmental standards

Green rating - ★

Under the CAP, all farmers receiving subsidies must respect environmental legislation and some basic good practice rules such as not destroying hedgerows or taking measures to avoid soil erosion. Few countries enforce these requirements correctly but the Health check ignores this, suggesting simplifying the rules without making it clear whether this would not result in further watering down. The Health check does propose that similar standards be set for water and climate change but gives too little detail of what actual rules may be and how would they be made to work.

Subsidy limits

Green rating - ★

This is the third time the Commission has proposed a ceiling on subsidies to individual farmers or landowners. Farmers with large amounts of land are likely to split their estates to avoid cuts. Further more, analysis of the proposal suggest very little funds would be redistributed and over spending pattern that sees about 80% of funds going to around 20% of the biggest and most intensive farmers wouldn’t change significantly, even if the rules are not circumvented.

The Vision

Green rating - ★★

There is no long-term plan for the CAP although the Health check does recognise the importance of the policy in tackling wildlife declines, water pollution, water shortages and climate change. Without a clear vision for the future, the massive amount the EU spends on farm subsidies is likely to come under pressure in the EU budget review in 2009.

Money for the environment

Green rating - ★★

€45bn of taxpayers' money is spent on the CAP each year, but most of it is spent on direct subsidies to farmers, not linked to environmental or social improvements. Only 20 per cent of CAP funds are spent on rural development and environmental measures. In 2002, the Commission proposed switching another 20 per cent of subsidy money to these two areas but the current proposal has reduced that figure to 12 per cent. Such a proposal would be an improvement on the status quo but is a far cry from what is needed.

Biofuels

Green rating - ★★★★★

The Health check would scrap subsidies for biofuel crops. This is good news for the environment as these subsidies are not based on greenhouse gas savings or environmental safeguards. However, this subsidy is increasingly dwarfed by the incentives given to biofuels through the energy policy. .

National envelopes

Green rating - ★★★★★

Member States can spend 10 per cent of subsidy funds on environmental and social measures but the rules are so rigid that few countries have done so. The Health check promises simplification and an increase in the amount that can be transferred. If properly elaborated this proposal could contribute to supporting sustainable farming, especially in marginal areas.

[4] “New Challenges, new CAP” is BirdLife’s vision for how the CAP can adapt and tackle new challenges in the run up to the CAP Health Check and the subsequent EU Budget review, which together form an unprecedented opportunity to reform and modernise the CAP.

The brochure “New Challenges, New CAP” can be downloaded by following this link:
<http://capvision.birdlife.org>