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### Avian Flu threat should not obstruct EU Directive to protect meat chickens

Eurogroup for Animal Welfare is very concerned about statements from some Member States suggesting that work on the new Directive on the protection of broilers (meat chicken) should be halted. It is claimed that because of Avian Flu and the drop in consumption, welfare rules will further erode the competitiveness of the Broiler industry. Eurogroup considers that it is unacceptable to use avian flu as an economic justification to accept the shocking suffering inherent to intensive broiler production.

*“Even before the advent of Avian Influenza, the European broiler producers’ were already seeing the danger signs of competing with low-priced foreign imports”* explained Sonja van Tichelen, Director of Eurogroup for Animal Welfare. *“Primary production costs are land, labour and feed, which can never be as low as their Thai or Brazilian competitors. European producers simply cannot compete on price without seriously affecting animal welfare and product quality”.*

Alongside many producers, Eurogroup believes that the industry will only survive if it differentiates to a higher quality product that produces healthy and robust animals and wins the loyalty of the European consumer. A Europe-wide Eurobarometer survey<sup>1</sup> in 2005 gave the most compelling call yet from consumers across Europe to improve the welfare of meat chickens. Most were not satisfied with their governments’ welfare policies and most rated the welfare of meat chickens as a priority. This was backed up by the results of an internet consultation<sup>2</sup> conducted by the Commission in December 2005.

The Agriculture Ministers are urged to tighten, rather than relax, the provisions of the Commission’s proposal in line with the advice of the EU’s own Scientific Committee<sup>3</sup>.

Ms van Tichelen added *“It is disturbing that the Council continues to weaken the welfare provisions in the Directive. For example, mortality levels of around 6 % - equivalent to 10.000 birds dying every fifteen minutes - is being proposed as being an acceptable level. At this point the Directive is seemingly aimed at protecting the industry rather than providing minimum protection for the birds”.*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/welfare/euro\\_barometer25\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/welfare/euro_barometer25_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/welfare/sum\\_response\\_stats\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/animal/welfare/sum_response_stats_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The EU Scientific Committee (SCAHAW) advised that stocking densities to be no higher than 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup> instead of the 30-38 kg/m<sup>2</sup> the Council is discussing at present.