



30.1.2015

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition No 2377/2013 by G.J. (German) on the use of ear tags for the identification of livestock

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner takes the view that the use of ear tags for the identification of livestock should be prohibited and be replaced with other methods, for example passive RFID chips or the storage of livestock blood samples. He argues that the affixation of ear tags can cause considerable pain, since the process involves the removal of a piece of tissue and the tags may also snag on various objects, further injuring the animals' ears and necessitating replacement.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 25 September 2014. Information requested from Commission under Rule 216(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 30 January 2015

The Council adopted Regulation (EC) No 21/2004¹ of 17 December 2003 establishing a system for the identification and registration of ovine and caprine animals and amending Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003 and Directives 92/102/EEC and 64/432/EEC. In accordance with that Regulation sheep and goats are to be identified properly and individually and all their movements should be individually traceable within and between Member States in order to facilitate the control of possible disease under the conditions of the single market.

To this end, the application of at least one conventional visible ear tag is compulsory, while

¹ OJ L5 9.1.2004 p. 8.

for the second identifier Member States may authorise alternative methods of identification, such as a ruminal bolus, different electronic ear-tags, pastern marks or tattoos.

In the case of bovine, Council Regulation (EC) No 1760/2000¹ of 17 July 2000 establishes that all animals shall be identified by an ear tag approved by the competent authority, applied to each ear. Both ear tags shall bear the same unique identification code, and both ear tags are needed in order to make possible to identify each animal individually together with the holding on which it was born.

Council Directive 2008/71/EC² of 15 July 2008 on the identification and registration of pigs establishes that animals must be marked as soon as possible, and in any case before they leave the holding, with an ear tag or tattoo making it possible to determine the holding from which they came.

Council Directive 98/58/EC³ on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes requires Member States to ensure that owners or keepers of animals take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of animals under their care and to ensure that those animals are not caused any unnecessary pain, suffering or injury. Council Regulation (EC) No 21/2004 specifies that Member States must ensure that any person responsible for the identification of animals has received instruction and guidance on the relevant provisions contained in this Regulation, and that appropriate training courses are available.

Conclusion

The Commission considers the EU system of identification and traceability for cattle, sheep, goats and pigs to be in general proportionate to the objectives. It provides the bases for an efficient system of traceability as well as high standards of animal health and food safety in the EU. This can only be achieved with a system of animal identification which is pragmatic and operational allowing, among others, for frequent and immediate verification of the animal identity on-the-spot.

On the above-mentioned basis, the Commission cannot support the petition seeking the prohibition of the use of ear tags as an official method for the identification of livestock in the EU.

¹ OJ L204 11.8.2000 p. 1.

² OJ L213 8.8.2008 p. 31.

³ OJ L221 8.8.1998 p. 23.