

WRITTEN QUESTION E-6300/08
by Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne (ALDE)
to the Commission

Subject: Sheep electronic identification devices

As I am sure the Commission is aware, there are a multitude of practical problems with the introduction and implementation of electronic identification devices (EIDs) for sheep. These include the facts that the various different systems of EID software and hardware technology developed by different companies are incompatible with each other; that the EID equipment is affected by electrical interference at markets and abattoirs, which is particularly concerning as a main part of the proposal is designed to record movements between farms, and that the readers for the EID equipment have difficulties in wet and cold conditions and that these conditions are the norm for many sheep farmers in the United Kingdom. Can the Commission explain how it proposes to resolve these problems before the introduction of the EID equipment?

As the Commission is undoubtedly well aware, the European Union sheep industry is under severe economic stress. In the United Kingdom the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs forecasts incomes for the year ending February 2008 at just £5 900 for sheep and cattle farmers in Less Favoured Areas and £8 900 in non-Less Favoured Areas. A low estimate of the cost of the introduction of EID and individual identification for sheep farmers is 18% of their incomes. Can the Commission state how it believes that sheep farmers will be able to continue not only to be competitive, but to survive, under such a burden? Will the Commission elaborate on the cost/benefit analysis it has undertaken to ensure that this proposal will not undermine the industry and, just as importantly, the wider rural communities it is meant to serve?