

Briefing for Commissioner WOJCIECHOWSKI

Online meeting with German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research

23 May 2022, 11:00 – 12:00

Online meeting

Content

SCENE SETTER	2
TOPIC 1 - Food Security and Green Deal Ambition	3
SPEAKING ELEMENTS.....	3
DEFENSIVES	4
TOPIC 2 - CAP Strategic Plans	7
SPEAKING ELEMENTS.....	7
DEFENSIVES	7
BACKGROUND	13
1. Measures taken by the EU to support the affected stakeholders to tackle the current crisis and to ensure food security:	13
2. EGD goals in Observation letters.....	14
3. Specific elements in the plans related to biodiversity (numbers do not take into account Belgium)	14
4. CVs.....	15

SCENE SETTER

- You will have an online meeting with German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research to discuss on food security, on the European Green Deal's ambition and on the CAP Strategic Plans.
- This meeting was triggered by a letter from the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (see [Ares\(2022\)1868855](#) and [Ares\(2022\)2617830](#)).
- Your interlocutors are concerned that the emergency measures introduced to aid the agri-food sector in response to the war in Ukraine will compromise the long-term objectives of the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategy.
- You can use the opportunity to reassure them of the Commission's commitment to sustainability and resilience of the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategy.

Personal data AGRI.A.1, Person
Personal data AGRI.E.1, Personal

TOPIC 1 - Food Security and Green Deal Ambition

SPEAKING ELEMENTS

- Thank you for your letter and for taking part in today's meeting.
- As you know, food security is a global challenge, with immediate consequences for countries in **Africa, Middle East, the Western Balkans and Asia**, who are highly dependent of food supplies from Ukraine and Russia.
- The current global food insecurity situation is dramatically worsened by the destabilising effects of the Russian aggression, and its policies. The threats and actions by Putin prove that he is using food (like energy) as a political instrument.
- Food supply is not at stake in the EU today, though many citizens are more vulnerable to food price increases. However, the EU must also play its part in exporting to food-deficit developing countries.
- In this context, the Commission adopted the **Communication on Food Security** setting out a number of measures to improve the food security in and outside of the EU.
- The communication sets out actions in **three areas**:
 - First, it presents our immediate actions to **safeguard food security** in **Ukraine** and **around the world**.
 - Second, we have addressed the challenge of **stability in the EU's food system**, with a range of measures to **support our farmers** and **maintain affordability for our citizens**.
 - Finally, we confirm our agenda to make our **food system sustainable and resilient in the years to come**.
- In this context of global tension and food risk, we have decided to allow for the possibility to grow crops on fallow land that is part of Ecological Focus Areas.

Reinforcing the resilience and sustainability of our food systems

- We fully agree with you that **the transition to sustainable agriculture, as envisaged in the Green Deal and Farm to Fork, is our only path to food security.**
- Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not going to make the climate and biodiversity crisis disappear. **The short-term solutions should not put a mortgage on our future.**
- Climate change and environmental degradation are ever-growing risks to food security, and we must also ensure that our food system is resilient to external shocks (such as the one we are experiencing now).
- That is why the **CAP Strategic Plans**, with their support for resilience and sustainability, are a crucial part of our response.

DEFENSIVES

What measures did the Commission introduce to address the effects of the crisis on the agrif-food sector?

- The Commission has adopted a number of measures to help EU farmers and consumers to tackle the current crisis:
 - allowing Member States to implement reduced rates of VAT on food items;
 - announcing a EUR 500 million support package for the affected farmers;
 - authorising advances on direct payments;
 - activating market safety-net measures for the pigmeat market;
 - authorising flexibilities to existing import requirements on animal feed;
 - proposing a temporary Crisis Framework state aid that also covers farmers, fertiliser producers, and the fisheries sector;
 - as well as announcing an exceptional and temporary derogation to allow the production of any crops for food and feed purposes on fallow land.
- The **European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism** (EFSCM), gathering European and national administrations and

private actors all along the supply chain, is also playing a role in the exchange of information in relation to the Ukraine crisis.

Why did the Commission introduce emergency measures? Is the Commission giving in to requests to weaken the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies?

- The Commission has urgently adopted a **package of short term emergency measures** for stabilising EU agricultural markets and addressing the risks to global food security, incl. the possibility to raise the EU's production capacity. The **derogation from the ecological focus area obligations** offers a short-term tool that should contribute to **increasing the supply of certain strategic crops** by allowing farmers to take appropriate production decisions in the short term.
- However, I and my Commission colleagues have stressed that we all need to **continue building a sustainable and resilient agriculture**, in line with the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies, through the promotion of more sustainable production methods that would enhance the resilience and agronomic preservation of agricultural land and other natural production factors over the medium term.

How can you ensure that these short-term emergency measures will not lead to greater long-term problems for sustainability and resilience?

- At this stage **it is crucial that we continue to monitor the evolution of the macro-economic situation (energy, inputs, incl. fertilisers, and food prices) and the market outlook for agricultural products** in relation with the development of the situation in Ukraine **before taking any further steps**.
- The Commission is in contact with **Member States** to obtain detailed information on how they are using the derogation from the ecological focus area obligations. There are currently no plans to extend these emergency measures beyond 2022.

Development of protein crops:

How will interventions in the CAP Strategic Plan contribute to develop protein crop production?

- Commission welcomes the increasing efforts by several Member States (with e.g. national protein strategies) to address the EU's import dependency in a key sector such as protein crops and legumes which are nitrogen fixing crops which do not require N-fertilisers.

- The Regulation contains several interventions that can promote the planting of protein crops.
- Coupled Income Support allows granting additional income support to farmers planting protein crops in view of the difficulties of the sector recognised at EU level. On top of the limited envelope, a 2% bonus is foreseen for MS planning coupled support for protein crops.
- Rules on sectoral programs also allow now to provide support to Producer Organisations established for protein crops.
- These specific interventions can complement other interventions that can contribute to the viability of the sector such as productive investments or risk management. It is up to Member States to set up a strategy in their Plans adapted to their national needs and conditions.

SET ASIDE:

Why was the derogation of land lying fallow approved?

- The Declaration of the informal European Council in Versailles put the focus on food security, stating “we will improve our food security by reducing our dependencies on key imported agricultural products and inputs, in particular by increasing the EU production of plant-based proteins.”
- Several MEPs, including the COMAGRI chair Mr Norbert Lins, have requested the Commission to “take immediate and decisive action to ensure that the supply of food to our citizens continues unimpeded and that our farmers are enabled to produce the food we will desperately need in this extraordinary period”.
- In this context, to alleviate possible disturbances in the sector, the Commission has put in place a package of short term emergency measures for stabilising agricultural markets. To enlarge the EU’s production capacity, the Commission has decided to derogate in 2022 from certain greening obligations, particularly the Ecological Focus Areas (EFA) requirements.
- Specifically, the Commission has decided to allow EFAs land lying fallow to be used for grazing and mowing, or to be cultivated with crops for food or feed. Lifting legal restrictions on the use of fallow land allows exploiting the full potential of these areas in facing some of the impacts of the Ukraine crisis.
- The derogation gives Member States a short-term tool that can contribute to increasing autonomy in certain strategic crops by allowing farmers to take

appropriate decision in the short term, while maintaining the full level of the greening payment.

- The adoption of such implementing act took place on 23 March 2022.

TOPIC 2 - CAP Strategic Plans

SPEAKING ELEMENTS

- **All national CAP plans have been sent to the Commission.**
- **By the end of April, the Commission has sent observation letters to the 22 Member States** who submitted their plan by the end of January.
- In the meantime, we are continuing to send the remaining observation letters.
-
- As you know, these letters provide **a joint assessment by Commission services of the draft CAP strategic plans.**
- So far, 20 observation letters were **published** and we intend to publish the remaining ones successively. The letters were published **together with the reactions of the Member States to the key observations** addressed to their authorities.

(See list of defensives for main environmental aspects on the observations letters)

DEFENSIVES

CAP strategic plans/Observation letters, focus on greening aspects

- The letters identify a number of elements that require further **explanation, completion or adjustments before the Commission is able to approve the Plans.**
- The first versions of the submitted Plans **very in terms of completeness and orientation towards results.** Many of the plans will need to revisit their intervention strategy and strengthen the links between intervention, result indicators and the allocated target values.
- In their further revision, the **MS will need to make an additional effort to** strengthen the EU's agricultural sector **resilience**; to reduce dependence on

synthetic fertilizers and transform their production capacity in line with more sustainable production methods.

GAEC standards

- In relation to GAEC standards, MS are asked to clarify or amend certain planned GAEC standards so that they fully **comply with the regulatory framework**.

Financial minimum allocation

- Some MS will need to **rectify financial planning** in order to comply with the required levels but also **to ensure that the scope and nature of the support** allocated to the minimum spending is **justifiable as ‘green’**.

Targets of the CAP indicators

- Many targets set against future result indicators in MS plans are higher – often substantially so – than the values achieved against the closest equivalent indicators from **the current period**. This is to be expected, as eco-schemes **are a new tool** contributing to action over the environment and climate, backed by a significant budget (see previous section).
- For many of the indicators related to agri-environmental ambition, **where targets are not defined or seem too low** to meet the relevant needs identified by the Member States, Commission **is requesting MS to clarify, complete or raise ambition** as well as to ensure the proposer links with interventions is established.

Eco schemes

- The eco-schemes proposed by Member States **vary significantly** in their level of **environmental ambition** – whether at the level of individual practices supported, or at the level of how options work together in multi-option schemes.
- **Assessing the expected performance of eco-schemes is a complex exercise**. It is very important to keep in mind that **eco-schemes cannot be assessed in isolation** from the other relevant tools from the green architecture (such as conditionality, management commitments with rural development payments).
- The performance of eco-schemes depends on the combination of, and is assessed by the Commission through:
 - the **level of ambition of the practice** (linked to the needs),
 - the **scope** (areas and/or farmers covered by the practice),

- the **payment**/reward allocated to the practice
- and the **articulation** with the rest of the **green architecture**.
- A “light green measure” can have a higher impact if applied on the whole territory than a “dark green measure” with a limited area scope. All these elements are considered together.
- **The Commission is expecting certain MS to exploit and optimize the potential of eco-schemes:**
 - Member States are asked to provide more explanation and justifications for the implementation choices on eco-schemes and the GAECs when unclear or elements are missing.
 - **The Commission is requesting Member States to be more ambitious** with the design of eco-schemes where necessary.

Agri-environmental-climate commitments

In the Observation letters MS are asked:

- to make certain eco-schemes or AECC interventions (or elements thereof) **more ambitious** with regard to environmental and climate-related benefits – by improving the commitments or including new ones;
- to clarify the “**articulation**” between planned GAEC standards, eco-schemes and AECC interventions - including, where necessary, by clarifying the respective requirements of the standards and interventions - so as to ensure that these work together effectively, and to avoid double-funding;
- to carefully consider planning interventions in their CAP Strategic Plans which will increase the sustainable generation and use of **renewable energy**, including biogas;
- to plan interventions which will **reduce energy consumption**;
- to plan interventions which will improve **nutrient efficiency** and **circular approaches to nutrient use**.
- There is a trend in many Plans for a continuation of current agri-environment-climate measures for which complementarity and relevant ambition is under scrutiny.
- However, some of the former agri-environment and climate measures under rural development have been shifted to Pillar I as eco-schemes, while those AECC with a lower area coverage remain in rural development, targeting specific issues.

- Similar to the eco-schemes, assessing the expected performance of agri-environment and climate commitments is complex exercise.
- We see in many cases also for the AECC that the articulation between the different instruments needs to be improved, to be able to assess the overall ambition of the Plans. This concerns in particular the possibilities to combine eco-schemes and agri-environment and climate commitments.
- **Agri-environment-climate commitments** proposed by Member States show huge variety.
- Many such interventions are designed as **broad schemes**, often consisting of various elements, covering several needs¹, and aiming at a high area coverage. For example: a reduction in fertiliser use; improved land management to address issues of water quality and soil fertility; and measures to restore and maintain habitats and species.
- Other AECC interventions are **very targeted - in particular those addressing biodiversity and very specific habitats – covering smaller areas and linked to fewer result indicators.**

CAP funds will continue funding measures that are likely to cause environmental harm. In particular, there is worry of large amounts of funds going to livestock sector, without incentivizing decreasing of livestock numbers in line with what Science tells us that is needed.

- Coupled support **targeting ruminant livestock sectors have always been (73% of all coupled support received for claim year 2021) and remains widely used in the proposed plans.** This is justified by the fact that, on EU average, farmers in the beef and veal and the sheep and goats **sectors have the lowest income** (below 75% of the average) per worker among the different agricultural sectors.
- The close interrelation between the **ruminants and grasslands is proposed by some MSs to enhance the CIS targeting to specific livestock systems** (e.g. eligibility and conditions related to: livestock density, number of animals per hectare of grassland and forage area ...) in order to enable **the provision of potential positive externalities** related to grasslands management (e.g. biodiversity, carbon storage ...).
- Additionally, an **increased use of CIS for legumes/protein crops**, including fodder legumes and mixes with grass, across the MSs contribute to the **increased ambition with regard to environmental and climate-related objectives and sustainability of the European livestock sectors.**

¹ And therefore linked to several result indicators.

Weak conditionality fails to provide adequate protection for water, wetlands, and peatlands and to create space for nature on farms. This results from an inadequate EU framework allowing various exemptions and from an unambitious national implementation.

- CAP legislation lays down the objective and scope of each standard but Member States will significantly influence to what extent each GAEC standard helps achieve the relevant objectives, through the implementation choices which they make
- The full set of future GAEC standards **marks an overall increase in environmental ambition in comparison** with the equivalent elements in the current CAP (current GAEC standards **plus “greening” requirements**) – thanks to new standards and improvements to other standards.
- Several Plans have improved GAECs from their current versions, to better respond to needs.
- In the area of **water protection**, **GAEC 4**, the minimum width is as a main rule 3 meters but some Member States set a larger width.

In general, Member States are requested, where needed, to:

- clarify or amend certain planned GAEC standards so that they fully **comply with the regulatory framework**;
- (in relation to the above point) make the requirements more **environmentally ambitious** (e.g. through sufficient area coverage under GAEC 6 and/or an appropriate definition of “crop rotation” under GAEC 7); better **justify** certain decisions (e.g. delay in implementation of GAEC 2).

BACKGROUND

1. Measures taken by the EU to support the affected stakeholders to tackle the current crisis and to ensure food security

To improve affordability of food, Member States may also implement **reduced rates of Value Added Tax** and encourage economic operators to contain retail prices. Member States can also draw from EU funds such as the **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)**, which supports EU countries' actions to provide food and/or basic material assistance to the most vulnerable.

The newly set-up **European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism (EFSCM)**, gathering European and national administrations and private actors all along the supply chain, will carry out a thorough **mapping of risks and vulnerabilities of the EU food supply chain**, followed by recommendations and appropriate mitigation measures.

To fulfil its role as a global food provider that continues to be fully engaged in the environmental transition, the EU agricultural sector needs all our support. For this purpose, the Commission has adopted in March 2022 the following measures:

- **A support package of €500 million**, including by making use of the crisis reserve, to support the producers most affected by the serious consequences of the war in Ukraine. On this basis, Member States could provide additional financial support to farmers to contribute to global food security, or address market disturbances due to increased input costs or trade restrictions. Support for farmers engaged in sustainable practices should be prioritised, whilst also ensuring that the measures target the sectors and farmers who are the hardest hit by the crisis.
- **Higher advances for direct payments**, as well as area- and animal-related rural development measures, to farmers as of 16 October 2022.
- **Market safety-net measures** (private storage aid) to support the pig meat market in view of the particularly difficult situation of the sector.
- The EU supply response is limited by the availability of fertile land. To enlarge the EU's production capacity, the Commission has adopted an implementing act to **exceptionally and temporarily allow Member States to derogate from certain greening obligations**. In particular, they may allow for production of any crops for food and feed on fallow land that is part of Ecological Focus Areas in 2022, while maintaining the full level of the greening payment. This temporary flexibility will allow farmers to adjust and expand their cropping plans this year. The Commission took note of the request to assess the possibility to prolong the derogation.

The Commission has also adopted a new, self-standing **Temporary Crisis Framework that also covers farmers, fertiliser producers and the fisheries sector**. This allows state aid to farmers and fishers affected by significant increases in input costs. Fertiliser prices and supplies for farmers will be monitored to ensure that the prospects for EU harvests are not jeopardised. The Commission is working coherently on addressing the **fertiliser challenge** through examining the potential of different approaches including replacement, circular economy and reduction of use, business continuity of EU fertiliser companies and finding new import sources.

Furthermore, the Commission considers creating under the EAFRD an exceptional temporary, limited, ring-fenced and conditional measure to address the needs of farmers most affected.

The Commission also proposes that, as from July 2022, **Member States communicate data on private stocks of essential commodities for food and feed** on a monthly basis to have a timely and accurate overview of their availability.

With regard to flexibility for imports of crucial commodities (in particular cereals, soybeans and fertilisers) from non-EU countries to alleviate the pressure on the feed market: Some Member States have decided to make use of the existing flexibility in EU legislation on maximum residue levels of pesticides for imports in duly justified cases, on an exceptional and temporary basis, that do not compromise food safety and consumer health. The Commission monitors such national measures.

2. EGD goals in Observation letters

With regard to the targets both from the Green Deal strategies and from the legislation, Member States must **explain** in their CAP Strategic Plans how their Plans **will help to achieve the targets**. In addition, they have been encouraged to set non-binding national targets – referred to as “**national values**” – in relation to the EU-level targets from the strategies.

Few Member States have indicated such national values in their CAP Strategic Plans – except in relation to organic farming. **By contrast, most Member States have provided explanation** of how their Plans will contribute to achieving the targets from the Green Deal strategies and the legislation.

Commission is expecting MS **in their revised plans to improve explanation and still to provide quantified national values for the specific GD targets** even though this quantification is not a legal requirement. It is also asking MS to **strengthen ambition and elements within interventions of the CAP plans which are of relevance for the attainment of the GD targets**.

3. Specific elements in the plans related to biodiversity (numbers do not take into account Belgium)

Member States provided a national value for high diversity landscape features.

GAEC standard 8 (non – productive areas and features).

24 Member States are offering farmers the “basic” option (4% of arable land), 13 are offering the “eco-scheme top-up” option and 15 are offering the option including catch crops or nitrogen-fixing crops.

10 Member States foresee all three options.

Of those Member States which have set a target for preserving habitats and species (R31), 11 have set a target to cover 0% – 20% of utilized agricultural area (UAA), 7 have set a target of 21%-40%, and 6 have set a target of 41% or more.

Of those Member States which have set a target for preserving landscape features (R34), 16 have set a target to aim at 0%-10% of UAA, 2 have set a target of 11%- 40%, and 2 have set a target of 41% or more.

The Member States so far have proposed one or more eco-schemes addressing the following main issues related to biodiversity: “biodiversity” (6 Member States), landscape features / non-productive areas (19), pesticide/pest management (9), nutrient management (12), extensive farming on permanent grassland (10), organic farming (11).

11 have proposed Natura 2000 payments on agricultural land. Member States have proposed a large number of management commitments and other interventions relevant to biodiversity (analysis ongoing).

Agri-environment management commitments planned for biodiversity include those that address pesticides/support Integrated Pest Management, preservation and restoration of grasslands and high nature value farming ecosystems, targeted species and habitat restoration

actions. There is a high degree of variability on links with the prioritized action Framework for Habitats and Birds.

4. CVs

Personal data





