

Flash report: Meeting between Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius and Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality Mr. Henk Staghouwer (video conference 25/02/2022).

Participants

NL: Minister Staghouwer, [REDACTED] (NL Ministry of Agriculture), [REDACTED] (NL PermRep).

COM: Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This meeting took place at the request of Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality Mr. Henk Staghouwer to discuss the nitrates issue

Commissioner Sinkevičius welcomed the ambition of the new integrated approach but also exposed the Commission concerns:

- The plans for the integrated approach are still to be defined per region and put into law.
- Many of the new measures will only start taking effect in the second half of 2023.
- The 7th Nitrates Action Plan, adopted by the previous government in November 2021, is what will apply until the new measures come into force. The Commission still have serious concerns on this plan.

Since there is a need for a transition period and in order to help the Netherlands to implement these significant yet very needed changes, Commissioner Sinkevičius proposed to approach the Committee asking for a positive opinion to a new 4 year derogation for the Netherlands, taking into account that this derogation would need to be shaped as a transition derogation. Given the time needed to develop such transition derogation the earliest possible vote would be in the Committee of September

Minister Staghouwer thanked Commissioner Sinkevičius for his support for this transition period, but asked for a vote in June.

Commissioner Sinkevičius exposed several reasons for maintaining the ordinary procedure (i.e. equal treatment of the Member States, need to take decisions with a solid legal and technical basis) and highlighted that the delay does not come from the Commission.

Minister Staghouwer acknowledged this was the case, but asked if it was possible to receive a “letter of intention” or a similar instrument to help him to address the issue with the farmers about manure management during the summer [no precise explanation was provided about the form or the purpose of such a letter/note, which would have to be assessed against legal constraints and collegiality rules].

Commissioner Sinkevičius offered the support of the Commission in considering this aspect and to continue the dialogue, since there is work still to be done.

Minister Staghouwer thanked Commissioner Sinkevičius for his help and cooperation and hoped a future physical meeting in Brussels for further discussion.

Next steps

The Commission and the Dutch authorities will maintain contacts in order to guarantee that next steps are taken on a solid legal and technical basis.