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EU Commission present plans for CAP

EFA press release by MEP Alyn Smith (SNP)

The European Commissioner for Agriculture, Dacian Ciolo, has today (Thursday) presented the Commission's proposals for the shape of a future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to members of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee. SNP MEP **Alyn Smith** has hailed the Communication, welcoming the many similarities between the Commission proposals and those presented in the Pack Report on future support for agriculture in Scotland.

Smith has published an initial brief on the contents of the proposal, but key points are that it, at the very outset, stresses the importance of food security, and the primary purpose of the CAP being to maintain food production by focussing direct payments on active farmers producing food. This is in outright opposition to the view of some member states, the UK Treasury in particular, who want to see direct payments ended. The Commission proposes moving LFA to the heart of Pillar 1, as a direct payment, and introduce an additional "green component" which looks similar in operation to Brian Pack's proposed "top up fund".

Smith said:

"Today's publication from the Commission very closely mirrors the Pack Report produced in Scotland, and while both remain work in progress as we gradually piece together a final position on a future CAP, I am glad to see that Scotland's views are well-represented so far.

"The Communication presented today only underlines that Scotland is very much at the mainstream of European thinking on the future of farming, markedly at odds with the UK whose anti-farming agenda, especially over the EU budget, is very much the odd man out in Europe.

"We've still got a long road ahead before we have a final CAP package, but what is clear is that we have it all to play for. Scotland has a vast stake in the reform of the CAP and it is vital that it is represented in any final agreement."

NOTE TO EDITORS:

A briefing from Alyn is below:

This Communication is similar both in structure and in content to the leaked draft Communication from October 2010.

Many of the changes to the wording concern the first half of the paper: the description of the overall objectives of CAP reform. The changes are mainly concerned with satisfying various interest groups by including their favourite "buzzwords" and important phrases, but all are secondary to the issue of food security, at least in the structure of the document with this very much the headline. Thus, there is elaboration on the need for the CAP to achieve "competitiveness", "simplification", and the need for greater environmental protection and concern for plant and animal health and welfare. One specific addition is the need for the EU to address its protein production deficit.

The far more interesting second half of the paper concerns the actual nuts and bolts proposals for a reform of the CAP. The architecture proposed is almost identical to the leaked paper from last month. The changes are bulleted below.

- * Direct Payments - Like the leaked Communication, this paper states that a flat rate payment across the whole EU is "not feasible", but that disparities in payments across Member States should be reduced.

- * Direct Payments - The Communication has watered down the wording on a proposed upper cap for individual direct payments - they should only "be considered". The Commission is backing down from a controversial point.

- * Direct Payments - There is more detail on the "green payment" top-up of direct payments - the actions to be rewarded should go beyond cross compliance, and be linked to agricultural activities (like crop rotation and permanent pasture) and NATURA 2000 areas should be included in the payment.

- * Direct Payments - The LFA (income support to farmers in areas with natural handicaps) payment in Pillar 1 will now go to "all" farmers in areas with natural constraints, and the wording about "optional national top ups on a voluntary basis" has been dropped, presumably because it was too vague and confusing.

- * Direct Payments - The specific scheme for small farmers should be for "competitiveness" and "cutting red tape", and the wording relating to "a minimum level of direct payment" has been dropped.

- * Cross Compliance - The Water Framework Directive could be included in cross compliance.

- * Market Measures - These should only be a safety net in case of a price crisis or market disruption.

- * Rural Development - Rural development should take advantage of "alternative distribution channels" to add value to local resources. The possibility of a "performance reserve" should be studied. Rural development should also promote the collaboration of farmers for biodiversity outcomes.

- * The "common strategic framework" for different EU funds should include LFA.

- * The description of the "three options" at the end of the paper has removed the negative comments on Options 1 and 3 - keeping them open as possible paths of reform, although Option 2 still seems to be the focus.

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