



**DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE
AN ROINN TALMHAÍOCHTA, BIA AGUS MARA**

SIX-MONTHLY REPORT ON DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EU

July to December 2023

INDEX

Part I

Introduction

Useful Websites

Part II

General Information

Overview of the Spanish Presidency

Agriculture priorities

Special Committee on Agriculture and Council Meetings

2.1 CAP Strategic Plans

2.2 International Trade Developments

2.3 Nature Restoration Law

2.4 Plants & Plant Products

2.5 EU fertilising products.

2.6 Forestry

2.7 Welfare of Dogs and Cats and their Traceability

2.8 The protection of animals during transport and related operations,

2.9 Organics

2.10 Horticulture and Plant Health

2.11 Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products

2.12 Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience, the Soil Monitoring Law.

2.13 Breakfast Directive

2.14 GI and Quality Schemes

Part III

Preview of the Belgium Presidency

Overall priorities for the Belgium Presidency

Agri-Fish priorities

Special Committee on Agriculture and Council Meetings

Table A - Draft legislative measures submitted for scrutiny from 1 July to 31 December 2023

Table B: Previous legislative measures adopted in the period from 1 July to 31 December 2023

PART I

Introduction

This report is submitted in accordance with the requirements of Section 2(5) of the European Union (Scrutiny) Act 2002.

The report outlines progress on EU agriculture and fisheries issues under the Spanish Presidency for the period 1 July to 31 December 2023, and provides a preview of the Belgium Presidency for the period 1 January to 30 June 2024.

The report also provides an overview, in tabular form, of the draft legislative measures laid before the Oireachtas during the period 1 July to 31 December 2023, on the basis of information notes. (Table A)

A total of 18 Information Notes were submitted by the Department between 1 July and 31 December 2023, 3 of which have been adopted and published in the Official Journal.

A further 8 previous legislative proposals were adopted during this period. (Table B)

Useful Websites

EU Legislation printed in the Official Journal: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOIndex.do?ihmlang=en>

Website search for EU legislation: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>

EU Agriculture Information: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index_en.htm

EU Fisheries Information: http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/index_en.htm

EU Animal Health and Welfare Information: https://food.ec.europa.eu/animals_en

EU Animal Health Strategy: https://food.ec.europa.eu/animals/animal-health/eu-animal-health-strategy-2007-2013_en

Department's website: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/>

Commission webpage on CAP post 2020: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/capfuture-2020/>

Spanish Presidency Website: <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>

Belgium Presidency Website: <https://belgian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/>

PART II

General Information

This was the fifth time Spain held the six-monthly rotating Presidency of the European Union. It was the first Presidency in the trio of Presidencies which will be followed by Belgium and Hungary. The next trio of Presidencies will commence with Poland in January 2025, followed by Denmark and Cyprus.

Overview of the Spanish Presidency

The Spanish Presidency came at a time when Europe was continuing to face challenges from the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. During the six months of the Spanish Presidency, Spain promoted institutional deepening and improved decision-making processes, as well as the enlargement of the European Union.

The overall objectives of the Spanish Presidency were to contribute to reindustrialising the EU and guaranteeing its open strategic autonomy, advancing in the green transition, promoting greater social and economic justice, and strengthening European unity.

Agriculture priorities

From an agricultural perspective, the Spanish Presidency continued the work to combat the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, such as market distortions and the rise in costs due to supply chain restrictions affecting raw materials, energy, and fuel.

In the face of these challenges, the Spanish Presidency sought to promote sustainable and efficient agricultural and fishing policies that safeguard the quality of life of the persons engaged in these sectors and guarantee food security in Europe.

Special Committee on Agriculture and Council Meetings

The Spanish Presidency held 11 meetings of Special Committee of Agriculture (10 & 17 July, 4 & 11 September, 2, 9, 16 & 30 October, 14 & 27 November, 04 December). The Presidency held five Council meetings (25 July, 18 September, 23-24 October, 20-21 November, 10-11 December). Minister McConalogue attended all Council meeting held during the Spanish Presidency.

The informal Agriculture Council took place in Cordoba between 3 and 5 September and was attended by Minister McConalogue.

2.1 CAP Strategic Plans

The CAP Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2027 reached the end of its first year of implementation. The Plan has a budget of €9.8 billion over five years. It contains a suite of 18 interventions to support the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of farming families and rural communities. The focus in the second half of 2023 was on ensuring that systems were in place to allow payments to begin issuing for scheme year 2023. In addition, the Department was developing the extensive range of new business

and IT processes required to support the delivery of the plan, with this work expected to continue into 2024. In this period, advance payments issued for the ANC, Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS), Complementary Income Support for Sustainability (CRISS), Eco-Scheme, Sheep Improvement Scheme, Protein Aid, and others, totalling over €1.7 billion.

Applications for tranche 2 of the flagship €1.5 billion agri-climate rural environmental scheme (ACRES), opened in December 2023. In all, 15 of the 18 CSP schemes have launched, as scheduled, with applications in line or exceeding expectations across most schemes.

Tenders were awarded in October 2023 following an open call for a Water Quality European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI). Teagasc in collaboration with the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) and Dairy Industry Ireland were successful in its application. The €60 million project aims to bring about improvements in water quality.

The CSP Monitoring Committee conducted a study visit to one of the ACRES Cooperation Projects to examine the implementation of the novel results-based approach on sensitive peatland areas.

Approval of the second amendment to Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027

During this 6-month period, the second amendment to the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP) was submitted to the European Commission for consideration, consisting mostly of minor adjustments and corrections. This followed consultation of Irish stakeholders through the Monitoring Committee for the CSP. The necessary environmental pre-screening processes were completed throughout the submission period.

Applications for tranche 2 of ACRES launched in November 2023. Farmers in ACRES are rewarded for the quality of their results, rather than just the quantity, which means that working to achieve a better outcome can translate to a higher payment.

An open call for proposals on the EIP on Breeding Waders was issued in December 2023.

Work will continue in this period to carry out the checks, inspections and controls related to the schemes, including checks through the Area Monitoring System. The more widespread use of the Area Monitoring system will be supported by extensive communication activity to ensure that farmers can engage in a timely manner.

Work will also continue to deliver on the extensive and significant obligations for reporting, monitoring, and evaluation for the CSP. Systems for the accurate reporting of CSP implementation data will continue to be progressed and refined in this 6-month period, to meet the requirements to report on result indicators, payment information, controls and penalties and other data sets for the CSP.

The Plan is also supported by a national CAP Network, which is a partnership between three organisations - Irish Rural Link, Erinn Innovation and Munster Technological

University. Their role is to enhance the implementation of schemes, improve the outreach and communication, and help with capacity-building for monitoring and reporting requirements. In addition, the network run an innovation hub to facilitate knowledge exchange, share opportunities for collaboration and bring innovations closer to on-the-ground application. CAP Network Ireland's website can be found here: [CAP Network Ireland - Home](#)

2.2 International Trade Developments

World Trade Organisation – Agriculture and Fisheries Negotiations

Work has been ongoing at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to build on the Fisheries Subsidy Agreement – Phase 1 reached at Ministerial Conference 12 (MC12) in June 2022. Whilst further negotiations on outstanding issues from Phase 1 of the Agreement were delayed until early 2023, the relevant committee at the WTO held regular “fish weeks” throughout the second half of 2023 in an attempt to build on the partial agreement reached at MC12 in time for Ministerial Conference 13 (MC13).

Likewise, despite the lack of a substantive outcome at MC12 for agriculture negotiations, the recommencement of these negotiations was delayed until the appointment of a new Chair of the negotiating committee in early 2023. Progress on these negotiations has been slow to date with no clear pathway being presented towards agreement at MC13.

Ministerial Conference 13 is scheduled to be held in February 2024 in Abu Dhabi. Both agriculture and fisheries subsidies are likely to be amongst the main issues where an outcome on negotiations will be sought, however, there is still a significant amount of work required to reach convergence on WTO members' positions and have the required consensus on any outcome at MC13.

Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)

The Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) was signed on 30th October 2016 and entered provisionally into force on 21st September 2017 meaning most of the agreement, including trade aspects, are now in effect.

The overall outcome on agriculture is satisfactory from Ireland's perspective. Although increased access to the EU market was granted for Canadian beef, greater access to the Canadian market for EU beef and dairy products (notably cheese) was also secured. To date, Canada has yet to fully utilise the additional beef access to the EU market provided for in the agreement. On exports, EU-Canada trade in agricultural products has increased by 50% up to the end of 2022.

The full ratification of CETA has not taken place in Ireland to date, with the Supreme Court ruling in November 2022 that the Government was precluded from ratifying CETA as it stands.

CETA is already provisionally in force since 2017, allowing Irish and Canadian companies take advantage of the beneficial terms of the Agreement across many sectors, including agriculture. 10 member states, including Ireland, have yet to ratify the full agreement.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment leads on ratification processes of Free Trade Agreements, with such agreements requiring the approval of Dáil Eireann. Government is reflecting on the decision of the Supreme Court, considering its implications on the potential ratification of CETA and the next steps in this process.

EU-Australia Free Trade Agreement Negotiations

Negotiations for a comprehensive and ambitious EU trade agreement with Australia commenced on 18th June 2018 and reached a political phase in May 2023. A third market access offer was made by the EU in May 2023, which included an offer on agri-food products. Following further negotiations throughout the second half of 2023, these talks ultimately collapsed in October 2023 with the Commission citing a backtracking on the part of Australian negotiators on progress made in discussions on market access for sensitive products such as beef, sheepmeat and sugar.

Ireland has emphasised the importance of ensuring that the cumulative impact of preferential access for sensitive products provided for in EU Free Trade Agreements and the UK's recent agreements with Australia and New Zealand are taken into account during the negotiations with Australia. In particular, Ireland urged the Commission to minimise the additional beef and sheepmeat access being offered to Australia throughout the negotiation process so that they do not undermine EU producers' interests and avoid potential disruption to the EU market.

The next steps are unclear at present, however, the political environment for an agreement is no longer favourable due to European elections in June 2024 and Australian parliamentary elections in early 2025. Commission have now concluded that it is unlikely that there will be further negotiations until after Australian elections in 2025.

EU-Chile Advanced Framework Agreement

Negotiations on modernising a previous EU-Chile Associations Agreement started in 2017 and political agreement was announced on a new Advanced Framework Agreement on 9th December 2022.

The first part of the Agreement is an "Interim Free Trade Agreement" that contains provisions that form part of the EU's exclusive area of competence in trade policy and can be ratified through the EU's institutions. Under the Interim FTA, 99.9% of EU exports will be tariff-free which is expected to increase EU exports to Chile by up to €4.5bn.

Ireland saw limited offensive of defensive issues in the Agreement; however, it does present some trade opportunities in dairy. For example, Chile has removed tariffs on EU dairy products, including the removal of the quota on EU cheese, as part of the Agreement.

The signing ceremony between the EU and Chile took place on 13th December 2023.

The Interim Free Trade Agreement pillar of the agreement is subject to ratification by qualified majority voting among EU member states and a simple majority in the European Parliament. This will expire once the Comprehensive Agreement enters into force and be subsumed into one Advanced Framework Agreement.

The European Parliament is expected to ratify both agreements in the first months of 2024 before going to Council to adopt the decisions to conclude the agreements.

EU-Indonesia Free Trade Agreement Negotiations

Negotiations for a trade agreement with Indonesia were launched in September 2016 and sixteen rounds of negotiations have taken place to date, with two rounds taking place in the second half of 2023. The 16th round, which took place on 4-8th December 2023, consisted of discussions on key outstanding issues, with these talks subsequently being described as remaining inconclusive.

During the round of the 2nd of December 2019, both sides exchanged a second offer for tariff liberalisation, building upon the initial offer that was exchanged at the fifth round. The second offer, while being an intermediate one, brings the proposed liberalisation to an already high percentage both in terms of number of tariff lines and trade volume and contained agriculture products such as poultry meat, eggs, rice, sugar, meat preparations and vegetables.

What is expected to happen during the period 01 Jan to 30 June 2024

A date for the 17th round of negotiations has not been set, however, intersessional discussions will continue in several areas within the proposed agreement. Prospects for significant progress in the first half of 2024 are seen as limited.

EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement

A political agreement between the EU and Mercosur on a new Free Trade Agreement was announced on 28th June 2019, marking the end of twenty years of negotiations. Further negotiations commenced between the Commission and Mercosur countries in March 2023 to address concerns raised by member states over environmental protections within the agreement.

Ireland has continually expressed concerns on the potential negative impact that the agreement presented to the Irish beef sector. The agreement includes a significant Tariff Rate Quota for South American beef of 99,000 tonnes Carcase Weight Equivalent (CWE).

To combat this, the Commission has stated a fund of €1 billion will be available to assist farmers should challenges arise due to market disturbance associated with the deal. The deal also includes a safeguard clause, which can be used if the EU agri-industry is, or is at threat of being, seriously affected by increased imports.

A Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA), contracted by the European Commission, and an Economic and Sustainability Impact Assessment (ESIA) for Ireland commissioned by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment were published in 2021. From an Irish agri-food perspective, the ESIA found that beef imports into the EU from Mercosur countries would increase by approximately 53,000 tonnes in a worst-case scenario. The report found such increases in imports if realised would only have limited impact in the value of Irish beef output of between €44m and €55m (approximately 2%) compared to the total value of Irish beef output of between €2.4bn in 2017 and €2.3bn in 2019.

The EU Commission and Mercosur have continued their technical negotiations with Mercosur on a joint instrument text throughout the second half of 2023, with this text ultimately expected to accompany the original agreement and address the environmental and sustainability concerns raised by member states, including Ireland.

Technical negotiations are expected to continue in early 2024, however, it is unclear as to whether any agreement will be reached on a joint instrument text in the first half of 2024.

If/when the final text of the Agreement is presented to EU countries for approval, the Government's position will be informed by its assessment of the additional instrument provisions secured by the EU related to sustainability commitments, along with the Economic Impact Assessment of the Agreement and safeguards provided to support the most sensitive sectors.

EU-India Free Trade Agreement Negotiations

The EU-India Leaders' Meeting held on 8th May 2021 agreed to resume negotiations for an ambitious and comprehensive EU Free Trade Agreement and to launch separate negotiations for an Investment Protection Agreement and an Agreement on Geographical Indications (GIs).

Since the resumption of negotiations, six rounds have taken place with the latest round held in Brussels on 16th-20th October. Prior to the sixth round, the Commission presented on its first market access offer to member states, with Ireland's interests focusing on potential opportunities in beverages and dairy. India also made their first market access in the second half of 2023; however, this was largely limited in its scope.

The seventh round of negotiations will take place in India from 19-23 February 2024. The next round after that will be held after elections in both Europe and India, therefore there is little progress expected in the first half of 2024.

Negotiations on a Modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement

An agreement in principle was reached on the trade aspects of a modernised EU – Mexico Global Agreement in April 2018, however, full political agreement with Mexico has not been obtained to date. The modernisation of the trade agreement is currently delayed over technical issues relating to the agreement, however, the text of the trade part of the agreement has been published.

From an EU agriculture perspective, significant market access improvements were agreed for core exports of cheese and dairy products to Mexico. There is also a considerable improvement of market access conditions for EU's exports for pork and poultry which, given that Ireland secured pigmeat access in 2020, will provide new export market opportunities for Irish pigmeat in particular.

The European Commission had stated a hope to have the EU and Mexico sign the modernised agreement in the latter half of 2023. However, this did not occur with Commissioner Dombrovskis stating to the European Parliament in November 2023 that there were still outstanding issues in technical negotiations between both sides.

It is unclear as to whether a solution to the current issues preventing signature will be resolved in the first half of 2024, particularly given that elections are being held in both Europe and Mexico in mid-2024.

EU-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement

Political agreement was reached on a new EU-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement on 30th June 2022. Finalising this agreement represents an important achievement for the EU with a key like-minded international partner, especially in the context of the ongoing geo-political uncertainties arising from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Agreement was signed by the EU and New Zealand on 9th July 2023.

This is the first EU trade agreement to include a Trade and Sustainability Chapter which is aligned to the EU's new "Trade Agreements for Green and Just Growth" approach and allows for stronger and more enforceable sustainability commitments, commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement and a specific list of green goods and services liberalised from the first day of application of the agreement. The Agreement includes provisions that all EU goods exports to New Zealand will be tariff free. It will provide for full liberalisation of 98% of EU tariff lines after 7 years for NZ imports.

In terms of agricultural products, the agreement will result in potential additional competition to the EU market in sheepmeat, beef and dairy products. However, overall,

the scale of additional market access has been limited to less than 1% of EU consumption levels and is less than what was demanded by New Zealand during negotiations. All Irish spirit GIs – “Irish Cream”, “Irish Poteen/Poitín” and “Irish Whiskey / Usice Beatha Eireannach / Irish Whisky” – have been included within the published texts of the agreement.

The EU’s internal ratification procedures were concluded in the second half of 2023, with the European Council adopting a decision to conclude the FTA on 27th November 2023. Once the internal procedures of the New Zealand parliament are completed, the agreement can enter into force.

It is anticipated that New Zealand’s internal procedures will be completed and allow for the agreement to enter into force during the first half of 2024.

2.3 Nature Restoration Law

COM No: COM/2022/304

The Nature Restoration Law reached conclusion of inter-institutional negotiations on the 9th November. Following trilogue negotiations, agreement was reached that NRL will restore at least 20% of the EU’s land and sea area by 2030. The target for all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050 was retained. Member States must put measures in place by 2030 to restore at least 30% of habitats in poor condition. Member States must also establish measures to restore at least 60% of habitats in poor condition by 2040 and at least 90% by 2050.

The article on agricultural ecosystems was retained despite being dropped from the earlier Parliament position. However, targets have been reduced. A measure rather than results-based approach has been agreed. Peaty soil restoration targets have been retained, however the rewetting targets for 2040 and 2050 have been reduced from half to third. An addition to the wording requires Member States to make rewetting an attractive option for farmers and landowners.

The text now includes a finance mechanism which will lead to proposals for adequate funding without prejudging the next multiannual financial framework. A year after the entry into force, the Commission must present a report with proposals for adequate financial measures.

Importantly for agriculture, an “emergency break” option has been added for 2023. This is a provision to suspend implementation in agriculture for up to one year via an implementing act in the event of unforeseeable and exceptional event outside of the EU’s control and with severe EU-wide consequences for food security.

The provisional agreement must be formally adopted by the co-legislators before entering into force.

2.4 Plants & Plant Products

Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed, and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/625 COM (2023)411 Add 1

The European Parliament have agreed a text with amendments to the original proposal on New Genomic Technique. The Special Committee on Agriculture discussed the topic of New Genomic Techniques in early December where a qualified majority was not achieved.

Despite significant progress under the Spanish presidency, there has not been enough support at Council Working Party to agree on a text in order to allow trilogues to commence. The primary stumbling block is patents and how they apply to New Genomic Techniques. The Belgian presidency are expected to continue to attempt to achieve sufficient support to progress to trilogues.

Proposal for Regulation OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT and of the Council on the production and marketing of plant reproduction material in the Union, amending Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, 2017/625 and 2018/848 of the European Parliament and of Council, and repealing Council Directive 66/401/EEC, 66/402/EEC, 68/193/EEC, 2002/53/EC, 2002/54/EC, 2002/55/EC, 2002/56/EC, 2002/57/EC, 2008/72/EC and 2008/90/EC (Regulation on plant reproduction material) COM (2023)414 Add1

First reading of the regulation began in 2023 and is ongoing at Council Working Party level.

2.5 EU fertilising products.

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1009 as regards the digital labelling of EU fertilising products.COM (2023)98

The Proposal aims at improving the readability of labels, leading to a more efficient use of fertilising products, and at simplifying the labelling obligations for suppliers while reducing the costs for the industry.

The opening political trilogue was held under the Spanish Presidency on 6 December 2023. Since that trilogue interinstitutional technical meetings took place in December 2023 and will continue under the Belgian Presidency.

2.6 Forestry

Reform of the Standing Forestry Committee: Terms of Reference

In December 2023 the European Commission proposes to amend Council Decision 89/367/EEC through a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council in relation to the terms of reference establishing the Standing Forestry Committee. The update of

the forest governance system was originally announced in the New EU Forest Strategy for 2030. The proposal is to amend Council Decision 89/367/EEC to update the legal bases and the policy references, to rename the Standing Forestry Committee, and to extend its tasks. The proposed decision would also clarify its membership to ensure that the Member States' authorities that are competent for the different policy objectives of the New EU Forest Strategy for 2030, including climate, forest health, environment, forestry, rural development and bioeconomy, and any subsequent Union Forest Strategies may be part of this group.

Ireland supports this measure. There are no areas of concern presently. It is proposed that the Standing Forestry Committee will be renamed the Standing Forest and Forestry Expert Group, and its scope expanded. The practical implications of this change will create a more inclusive and inter-disciplinary Expert Group reflecting the environmental, social and economic objectives of the EU's New Forest Strategy.

Proposal on legal framework for forest monitoring and strategic plans

The EU Forest Strategy 2030 committed to introducing a comprehensive, high-quality monitoring system that covers all forests and other wooded land in the EU can help to better counter all these pressures and hazards. For example, frequent monitoring of tree cover gives details of any earlier proposals or consultation process relevant to the proposal. This proposal aims to:

- (i) ensure coherent high-quality monitoring that makes it possible to track progress towards achieving EU targets, policy objectives and targets that concern forests including on biodiversity, climate and crisis response;
- (ii) improve risk assessment and preparedness; and
- (iii) support evidence-based decision-making by land managers and public authorities, promote research and innovation.

The proposal further aims to support Member States in voluntary integrated long-term planning to strengthen the consistent implementation of the various sector-based policy objectives and targets to secure forest resilience in a changing climate.

Regulation on making available on the Union market as well as export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation.

While not formally lead by the presidency it is worth noting that several meetings of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform on deforestation took place during the six-month term of the Spanish Presidency. Topics covered were wide ranging on different aspects of the regulation including the EU wide Information system; country benchmarking system and engagement with third countries especially small land holders in those countries. The EU CION also published an updated FAQ Document for operators and traders on the regulation.

On 29 December 2023 Ireland formally informed the European Commission that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine was the designated Competent Authority in Ireland.

Preparation for the participation of the EU and its Member States in the 19th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests held in New York, May (6-10, 2024).

In October 2023, the ES Presidency lead the EU Delegation at an open-ended ad-hoc expert group on international arrangements on forests. This meeting was the first step in preparing for the 19th United Nations Forum on Forests which will take place under the Belgium Presidency in May 2024.

Debate at the Working Party on Forestry on national needs for action on non-Wood Forest Products.

On 11 July 2023 the ES held a detailed discussion at the Working Party on Forestry on the topic of Non-Wood Forest Products framed in the context of the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030.

While several MS stressed the importance of non-wood forest products to the EU economy there was a view that no further legislation was required in this area presently. The outcome of the discussion was sent to Ministers as a note from the presidency.

2.7 Welfare of Dogs and Cats and their Traceability

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Welfare of Dogs and Cats and their Traceability COM No: COM (2023) 769

The European Commission has been considering an update of the existing animal welfare legislation. Following discussion of issues relating to the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats at several EU Animal Welfare Platform meetings and related voluntary initiative meetings, the Commission published its proposed regulation in December 2023, towards the end of the Spanish Presidency.

According to Eurobarometer 2023, 44% of EU citizens own companion animals and 74% believe companion animal welfare should be better protected. EU trade in dogs and cats has an estimated annual value of €1.3 billion and online sales are increasing, as is illegal trade.

This Proposal considered conclusions from EU Animal Welfare Platform voluntary initiatives on health and welfare of pets (dogs and cats) in trade, EFSA scientific opinion on welfare aspects related to cats and dogs in commercial breeding establishments and evidence during EU Co-ordinated Action in 2022/2023 on illegal trade of cats and dogs.

In 2020, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on illegal trade in companion animals calling for harmonised EU mandatory identification and registration of cats and dogs and improved protection of consumers purchasing companion animals via online listings.

Although EU legislation is in place for the protection of dogs/cats used for scientific purposes, for transportation of dogs/cats, and for movement of dogs/cats in the context of animal diseases, there is currently no EU legislation on welfare of dogs/cats and no specific EU obligations for sale of dogs/cats via online platforms.

This Proposal aims to address these issues by introducing:

- (i) Uniform welfare standards for breeding, keeping, and placing on the market of dogs/cats bred or kept in breeding establishments, pet shops or animal shelters.
- (ii) Improved traceability of dogs/cats on the EU market, including those for sale/adoption, and
- (iii) Supplementing existing rules for importing dogs and cats.

In addition, competent authorities will be required to provide training for animal caretakers, approve animal welfare training programs and establish a national microchip database for dogs/cats.

Lead-in periods of 3 to 5 years will apply to some provisions, such as approval of breeding establishments and establishment of a national microchip database. Competent authorities will be required to collect and publish data on animal welfare, and report to the Commission every 3 years.

The policy areas within the regulation come under both the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (welfare, traceability) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (dog breeding establishments). For that reason, officials from both Departments are collaborating closely on this regulation.

It is expected that the discussions will be completed by the end of the Belgian Presidency, but this depends on how the meetings progress.

**2.8 The protection of animals during transport and related operations,
Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the
protection of animals during transport and related operations, amending Council
Regulation (EU) No 1255/97 and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005.
COM No: COM (2023)770**

- (i) Legislative proposal was published by the Commission on 7/12/2023.
- (ii) proposal was discussed in detail at Working Party on Animals and Veterinary Questions (Animal Welfare) on 18 December 2023.
- (iii) Consultation of the European Economic and Social Committee by the Council, on COM (2023)770, was communicated on 1 March 2024.
- (iv) Belgian presidency is prioritising file COM (2023) 769 on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability.

2.9 Organics

The government is focused on reaching 10% of all land farmed organically by 2030. This target has been incorporated into Ireland's Climate Action Plan.

An open call for Organic projects to promote the organic sector closed in August 2023. A total of twelve innovative proposals that promote the multi-functional benefits of organic farming & production in Ireland were chosen to receive funding. This call was the first of its kind for the organic sector. These projects will further support the Programme for Government target of creating a viable organic sector.

2.10 Horticulture and Plant Health

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards multiannual survey programmes, notifications concerning the presence of regulated non-quarantine pests, temporary derogations from import prohibitions and special import requirements of proposal for granting them, temporary import requirements for high risk plants, plant products and other objects, the establishment of procedures for the listing of high risk plants, the content of phytosanitary certificates, the use of plant passports and as regards certain reporting requirements for demarcated areas and surveys of pest. COM No: 2023 661

Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 provides measures to prevent pests from entering the EU, or to eradicate them immediately if found present on EU territory, thus ensuring a uniform level of phytosanitary protection within the EU territory. It also seeks to level the playing field for EU producers and traders in plant and plant products on the EU internal market and sets out measures on imports to the EU from third countries.

On 10 December 2021, the Commission submitted two reports to the European Parliament (in line with Article 50 and Article 79(6) of the Regulation) presenting findings on the implementation of key provisions of the regulation, one report on the import measures and a second report on the extension of the plant passport requirement to all plants for planting.

On 17 October 2023, the Commission submitted a proposal for a revision of the Plant Health Regulation. Some of the amendments relate to the above-mentioned reports. The amendments are broadly bringing legal clarity and certainty on parts of the regulation, increases transparency and flexibility of regulatory procedures and seeks increased digitalisation of reporting obligations and administrative tasks.

Under the Swedish Presidency, Amendment to the Plant Health Regulation were discussed as Agenda items at the November 2023, December 2023 (and under BE Presidency at January 2024 and February 2024 COPHs meetings)

On 20 December 2023, the Belgian and outgoing Spanish Presidency submitted a compromise text for consideration by delegations. Work continues under the Belgian Presidency.

2.11 Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the sustainable use of plant protection products and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115. COM No: COM/2022/305

Discussions continued at Council Working Group during the Spanish Presidency on all chapters including draft alternative text for some sections of the proposal, but no agreement was reached.

The Parliament rejected the proposed Parliament text at plenary in December 2023.

2.12 Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience, the Soil Monitoring Law.

On the 5th of July 2023 the European Commission published the proposal for a Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience, the Soil Monitoring Law. This proposal was developed from the results of EU Soil Expert meetings held by the Commission throughout 2022. The Department of Environment, Climate and Communications are the lead government department in respect to this legislation and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine are working closely with them in representing Ireland on the EU soils expert working group. The two government departments also engage with colleagues in Teagasc, Department Housing Local Government and Heritage (NPWS), Environmental Protection Agency and Geological Survey Ireland in relation to the proposals within the soil monitoring law. The long-term objective of the proposed Soil Monitoring Law is to have all soils across the EU in healthy condition by 2050, as outlined in the soil strategy. To achieve this ambitious goal, the proposal provides a common definition of what constitutes a healthy soil and lays down measures on monitoring and assessment of soil health, sustainable soil management, and remediation of contaminated sites. Under the Spanish presidency discussions at the Council Working Party on the Environment (WPE) commenced in November 2023.

Work will continue under the Belgian Presidency who hopes to reach an agreed general approach by Council.

2.13 Breakfast Directive

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directives 2001/110/EC relating to honey, 2001/112/EC relating to fruit juices and certain similar products intended for human consumption, 2001/113/EC relating to fruit jams, jellies and marmalades and sweetened chestnut purée intended for human consumption, and 2001/114/EC relating to certain partly or wholly dehydrated preserved milk for human consumption. COM No: (2023) 201: -

The Directives provide common rules on the composition, sales name, labelling and presentation of certain foodstuffs so as to protect the interests of consumers and to ensure the free movement of these products within the internal market.

The Spanish Presidency held a working party meeting on 7 July 2023 in continuation of the work undertaken by the Swedish Presidency in their second revision of the Commission's proposal. The Spanish Presidency raised specific questions on the revision explicitly in respect to the revised proposals on labelling of origin on honey labels, and honey analysis, and on fruit juice product categories, and they invited Member States to raise comments on this or any other issues.

The Spanish Presidency produced a third revision following their second working party meeting on 4 September and this included the proposal that was of concern to Ireland that 'marmalade' should be called 'citrus marmalade'. The background to this proposal was that, in some Member States, the terms 'jam' and 'marmalade' are used interchangeably for what Irish consumers would generally know as 'jam': the proposal to facilitate that use by Member States included a linked proposal that would require the product traditionally known in Ireland as 'marmalade' to be renamed on the market (on labels etc) as 'citrus marmalade'. Ireland raised concerns about the proposal and the Spanish Presidency and the European Commission's proposal was amended to Ireland's satisfaction such that the term 'marmalade' may continue to be used for the product traditionally known as marmalade.

The Belgian Presidency will bring the proposals/mandates to trilogue with a view to reaching agreement and to finalisation of the Directive.

2.14 GI and Quality Schemes

COM No: (2022) 134: Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on European Union geographical indications for wine, spirit drinks and agricultural products, and quality schemes for agricultural products, amending Regulations (EU) No 1308/2013, (EU) 2017/1001 and (EU) 2019/787 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012

On 31st March 2022, the European Commission adopted the proposal for a Regulation on Geographical Indications for wine, spirit drinks, and agricultural products, and other quality schemes for agricultural products. The proposal was the subject of discussion at Working Party meetings under the Czech and Swedish Presidencies. A general approach/mandate text was agreed by the Swedish Council on 8 May 2023.

The text was subject to four Trilogue discussions between 6 June 2023 and 24 October 2023. The political agreement reached at the final Trilogue was confirmed by Member States at the Special Committee on Agriculture on 27 November 2023.

The key differences between the initial proposal and the final Regulation in the context of concerns raised by Ireland are as follows:

- (i) The role of the European Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO): The Commission had proposed that EUIPO would have a role in scrutiny of GI applications as well as administrative procedures. The political agreement resulted in the Commission retaining all competencies in relation to GI policy, while EUIPO's role will be to maintain the Union register with respect to registrations, amendments and in respect of the protection of GIs in domain names. This was a satisfactory outcome for Ireland which considered that it was appropriate that, given their expertise in agricultural and food matters, the scrutiny of geographical indication application should rest with the European Commission.
- (ii) Sustainable practices: The political agreement text allows for Producer Groups or Recognised Producer Groups to agree, on a voluntary basis, adherence to sustainable practices which aim to apply standards higher than those laid down by Union or national law. There is a provision for voluntary reporting by the Producer Group or Recognised Producer Group on sustainable practices. This was a satisfactory outcome for Ireland on the basis that, in regard to criteria for eligibility for products to qualify for a geographical indication, it remains voluntary for GI producers to refer to sustainable practices should they wish to do so.
- (iii) Ingredients in the names of processed products: a geographical indication designating a product used as an ingredient could be used in the name of a prepacked food if certain conditions are met. Producers of a prepacked food containing as an ingredient a product designated by a geographical indication who want to use that geographical indication in the name shall give a prior written notification to the Recognised Producer Group where one exists. Ireland acknowledged the merits of this provision for the benefit of producers to protect use of their GI products against imitation.
- (iv) Recognition of producer groups: The political agreement text leaves it open to Member States to decide if a system for recognising one producer group as a representative for other GI producers/groups for a geographical indication is appropriate; the Commission text had proposed that it would be mandatory for Member States to set up such a system. This was a satisfactory outcome for Ireland which considered that it should be open to Member States to determine if such recognition was appropriate.
- (v) Formation of producer groups: The political agreement text introduces provisions clarifying the form and functions of producer groups and applicant producer groups. Ireland considers that this brings clarity to the Geographical Indication process.

PART III

Preview of the Belgium Presidency

This will be the thirteenth time that Belgium will hold the six-month rotating Presidency of the European Union. The Belgian term takes place from the 1st of January to the 30th of June 2024. Belgium is the second in a trio of presidencies consisting of Spain, Belgium and Hungary.

Overall priorities for the Belgium Presidency

Belgium is assuming the Presidency at a critical junction for the European Union, with the Union dealing with the consequences of the Russian illegal aggression in Ukraine, the pandemic, the energy crisis, extreme climate events, disinformation, and a renewed conflict in the Middle East.

The Belgian presidency will focus on six thematic areas and will provide particular attention to maintaining support to Ukraine.

- (i) Defending rule of law, democracy, and unity
- (ii) Strengthening competitiveness
- (iii) Pursuing a green and just transition
- (iv) Reinforcing our social and health agenda
- (v) Protecting people and borders
- (vi) Promoting a global Europe

As the current institutional cycle concludes, the presidency will also support a transition to the next one. It will support the adoption of the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 and prepare discussions on the future of the European Union.

Agri-Fish priorities

The Belgian Presidency will promote a holistic approach to agriculture and fisheries. Ensuring food security and autonomy will be core objectives of the Presidency. The Belgium Presidency has set out the following priorities for the Agriculture and Fisheries sector:

- (i) A sustainable and resilient agri-food and fisheries sector
- (ii) Resilient forests
- (iii) Prevention in animal health and animal welfare

Special Committee on Agriculture and Council Meetings

The Presidency has so far scheduled 14 meetings of the Special Committees of Agriculture (8, 15 & 29 January, 12 & 19 February, 11 & 18 March, 7-9, 15, 22 April, 13, 21 May, 10, 17 June) and 6 Council Meetings (23-24 January, 26 February, 26 March, 29-30 April, 27-28 May, 24-25 June)

The Informal Council is scheduled to take place 7-9 April in Limburg Belgium.

Table A - Draft legislative measures submitted for scrutiny from 1 July to 31 December 2023

COM (2023) 98	Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1009 as regards the digital labelling of EU fertilising products	Ongoing
COM (2023) 201	Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directives 2001/110/EC relating to honey, 2001/112/EC relating to fruit juices and certain similar products intended for human consumption, 2001/113/EC relating to fruit jams, jellies and marmalades and sweetened chestnut purée intended for human consumption, and 2001/114/EC relating to certain partly or wholly dehydrated preserved milk for human consumption.	Ongoing
COM (2023) 362	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down conservation, management and control measures applicable in the area covered by the Convention on future multilateral cooperation in the North-East Atlantic fisheries, amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009, and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 1899/85 and Regulation (EU) No 1236/2010	Ongoing
COM (2023) 411	Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed, and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/625	Ongoing
COM (2023) 414	Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the production and marketing of plant reproductive material in the Union, amending Regulations (EU) 2016/2031, 2017/625 and 2018/848 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Council Directives 66/401/EEC, 66/402/EEC, 68/193/EEC, 2002/53/EC, 2002/54/EC, 2002/55/EC, 2002/56/EC, 2002/57/EC, 2008/72/EC and 2008/90/EC (Regulation on plant reproductive material)	Ongoing

COM (2023) 415	Proposal on the production and marketing of forest reproductive material, amending Regulations (EU) 2016/2031 and 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directive 1999/105/EC (Regulation on forest reproductive material)	Ongoing
COM (2023) 495	Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EU) 2023/194 fixing for 2023 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters, as well as fixing for 2023 and 2024 such fishing opportunities for certain deep-sea fish stocks.	Adopted by Council 28/09/2023 Publication in the Official Journal 29/09/2023
COM (2023) 499	Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION amending Annexes II and V to Regulation (EC) No 396/2005 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards maximum residue levels for tricyclazole in or on certain products	Ongoing
COM (2023) 578	Proposal for a Council Regulation fixing the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Mediterranean and Black Seas for 2024	Adopted by Council 10/01/2024 Publication in the Official Journal 11/01/2024
COM (2023) 587	Proposal for a Council Regulation fixing for 2024, 2025 and 2026 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters, and amending Regulation (EU) 2023/194 as regards deep-sea stocks.	Adopted by Council 10/01/2024 Publication in the Official Journal 11/01/2024
COM (2023) 643	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013, Regulation (EU) No 167/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 168/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards certain reporting requirements	Ongoing

COM (2023) 661	Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL amending Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards multiannual survey programmes, notifications concerning the presence of regulated non-quarantine pests, temporary derogations from import prohibitions and special import requirements and establishment of procedures for granting them, temporary import requirements for high risk plants, plant products and other objects, the establishment of procedures for the listing of high risk plants, the content of phytosanitary certificates, the use of plant passports and as regards certain reporting requirements for demarcated areas and surveys of pest	Ongoing
COM (2023) 727	Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Decision 89/367/EEC setting up the Standing Forestry Committee	Ongoing
COM (2023) 728	Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a monitoring framework for resilient European Forests.	Ongoing
COM (2023) 739	Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION amending Annex II to Regulation (EC) No. 396/2005 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards maximum residue levels for thiacloprid in or on certain products	Ongoing
COM (2023) 769	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Welfare of Dogs and Cats and their traceability	Ongoing
COM (2023) 770	REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the protection of animals during transport and related operations, amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1255/97 and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005.	Ongoing
COM (2023) 771	Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulations (EU) 2016/1139, (EU) 2018/973 and (EU) 2019/472 as regards the targets for fixing fishing opportunities	Ongoing

Table B: Previous legislative measures adopted in the period from 1 July to 31 December 2023

COM (2023) 108	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2019/833 laying down conservation and enforcement measures applicable in the Regulatory Area of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation	Adopted by Council 13/12/2023 Publication in the Official Journal 20/12/2023
COM (2023) 252	Proposal for a Council Regulation on the allocation of fishing opportunities under the Protocol on the implementation of the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Community on the one hand, and the Republic of Kiribati, on the other (2023-2028).	Adopted by Council 06/09/2023 Publication in the Official Journal 18/10/2023
COM (2023) 276	Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EU) 2022/109 of 27 January 2022 fixing for 2022 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in Union Waters and for Union fishing vessels in certain non-Union waters, and Regulation (EU) 2023/194 of 30 January 2023 fixing for 2023 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks, applicable in Union waters, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters, as well as fixing for 2023 and 2024 such fishing opportunities for certain deep-sea fish stocks.	Adopted by Council 20/07/2023 Publication in the Official Journal 21/07/2023
COM (2022) 296	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1217/2009 as regards conversion of the Farm Accountancy Data Network into a Farm Sustainability Data Network	Adopted by Council 22/11/2023 Publication in the Official Journal 29/11/2023
COM (2022) 659	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the labelling of organic pet food.	Adopted by Council 18/10/2023

		Publication in the Official Journal 27/10/2023
COM (2021) 434	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain provisions for fishing in the GFCM (General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean) Agreement area (recast)	Adopted by Council 4/10/2023 Publication in the Official Journal 12/10/2023
COM (2020) 670	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a catch documentation programme for bluefin tuna (<i>Thunnus thynnus</i>) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 640/2010	Adopted by Council 13/12/2023 Publication in the Official Journal 20/12/2023
COM (2019) 619	Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a multiannual management plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean, amending Regulations (EC) No 1936/2001, (EU) 2017/2107, and (EU)2019/833 and repealing Regulation (EU) 2016/1627.	Adopted by Council 13/09/2023 Publication in the Official Journal 27/09/2023