BACKGROUND
Brussels, 11 December 2019

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL
16 and 17 December 2019 in Brussels

The Council meeting will take place on Monday 16 and Tuesday 17 December 2019 in Brussels, starting on both days at 10.00h. It will be chaired by Jari Leppä, minister for Agriculture and Forestry of Finland.

On the first day, the meeting will start with the approval of A items and will follow with a preliminary exchange of views on the Commission proposal fixing the 2020 fishing opportunities for the main fish stocks in the Atlantic and the North Sea. The Council will then try to reach a general approach on the regulation on Eastern Baltic cod fishing.

New ministers will be informed about a variety of Any other Business items, including: minor uses of pesticides on niche crops, and the already adopted Council conclusions on the updated EU bio-economy strategy.

Over lunch ministers will informally discuss the topic "World's forests for the sustainable future" with the Director General of the FAO Qu Dongyu and Commissioners Urpilainen, Wojciechowski and Sinkevičius.

In the afternoon, ministers will have an exchange of views over the progress report on the Post-2020 CAP reform package.

On the second day ministers will revert to fisheries with the objective to reach a political agreement on the 2020 fishing opportunities in the Atlantic and the North Sea by the end of the day. Ministers will also be informed about the budget flexibility within the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2014-2020.

The Council is expected to adopt a set of conclusions on food fraud, animal welfare, and forestry.

Press conferences:

on 16 December - at approximately 15.10h and 18.30h
on 17 December - timing to be confirmed

Press conferences and public events by video streaming
Video coverage in broadcast quality (MPEG4) and photo gallery
FISHERIES

Atlantic and North Sea fishing opportunities for 2020

The Council is due to reach a political agreement on a regulation concerning the 2020 catch limits for the main commercial fish stocks in the Atlantic and North Sea.

The Commission proposal (13438/19 + ADD 1 + ADD 2) establishes fishing opportunities in the form of yearly total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas by fish stocks in the different fishing zones. It concerns stocks that the EU manages either autonomously or jointly with third countries, for instance with Norway in the North Sea and the Skagerrak, or through agreements reached in the framework of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs).

Based on the scientific advice provided by the International council for the exploration of the sea (ICES), the European Commission proposes that next year the fishing quota is either increased or remains the same for 32 stocks out of 72, and is reduced for 40 stocks.

In line with the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the Commission proposed fishing opportunities at “maximum sustainable yield” (MSY) for the stocks with a full scientific assessment, and at “precautionary levels” for other stocks.

The Commission proposal is based on a Commission communication on the state of play of the CFP and consultation on the fishing opportunities for 2020 (10186/19 + ADD 1), presented to the Council in June 2019.

The setting of TACs and quotas is an annual management exercise decided upon by the Council in accordance with Article 43(3) of the TFEU. It takes place in parallel the adoption of fishing opportunities in the Black Sea, and is preceded by a similar TAC setting exercise on deep sea fish stocks in November (every second year), and on Baltic Sea stocks in October.

Regulation on Eastern Baltic cod

The Council is due to reach a general approach on a regulation amending the Baltic multi-annual plan as regards the introduction of capacity limits for Eastern Baltic cod, data collection and control measures in the Baltic Sea, and the European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) in order to allow for permanent cessation to be used to scrap vessels targeting Eastern Baltic cod.

The proposal (13679/19 + COR 1) was submitted by the Commission in October 2019 as a consequence of the decisions taken at the October Agriculture and Fisheries Council on the Eastern Baltic cod. At that meeting in order to take account of the alarming state of the stock, the Council had decided to close the Eastern Baltic cod fishery and to significantly reduce other fisheries linked to cod. These unprecedented restrictions are expected to lead to redundant fleet capacities and severe adverse socio-economic consequences for the relevant coastal communities and fishing businesses.

Baltic Sea: Council agreement on 2020 catch limits (press release, 15 October 2019)
AGRICULTURE

Post 2020 Common agricultural policy (CAP) reform package: State of play

In public session the Council will consider a presidency progress report (14983/19) on the work carried out in the Council on all the Commission proposals of the CAP reform package.

During Finland's presidency work focused in particular on the new delivery model, environmental and climate related aspects, and other elements such as: definitions ("genuine farmer", "permanent grassland", "eligible hectare", etc.), types of interventions in the form of direct payments, administrative elements and financial instruments.

The Commission proposals

The reform package consists of three proposals for:

- a regulation on CAP strategic plans (9645/18 + ADD 1)
- a regulation on financing, managing and monitoring of the CAP (9634/18 + ADD 1)
- a regulation on a common market organisation of agricultural products (9556/18)

and an impact assessment (9646/18 + ADD 1 + ADD 2).

The proposed CAP reform introduces a new delivery model that will allow member states more flexibility in the way they use EU funds and will allow them to tailor-make their programmes. Based on 9 EU-wide economic, environmental and social objectives, each member state would have to draw up a Strategic Plan setting out how it intends to meet those objectives while taking account of its needs, using direct payments, rural development and market measures. The Commission would approve each plan to ensure consistency and the protection of the single market, and monitor progress towards objectives and targets using a set of result indicators agreed at EU level.

The Commission proposals also outline new obligations and incentives for farmers in the field of environment and climate action. Direct payments would be conditional on enhanced environmental and climate requirements and member states would have to offer eco-schemes to support farmers in going beyond the mandatory requirements, funded with a share of their national direct payments' allocations.

Moreover, the new CAP would better target small and young farmers, thereby facilitating generational renewal, and would try to foster greater use of knowledge and innovation.
ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Budget flexibility within the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2014-2020

The Czech delegation will draw the Council attention to its request to focus on effective use of financial resources remaining in the current European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF - 14906/19).

It will in particular call on the Commission to consider an appropriate amendment of current legislation as soon as possible in order to allow allocation flexibility between Union Priorities under the EMFF.

Conclusions on the updated EU bioeconomy strategy

The presidency will inform the Council about the Council conclusions on the updated EU bioeconomy strategy "A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment", which were adopted by the "Competitiveness" Council on 29 November 2019 (14907/19 and 14594/19).

Bioeconomy comprises those parts of the economy that use renewable biological resources from land and sea to produce value-added products such as food, feed, materials and energy. In 2012 the Commission published its Bioeconomy strategy and in 2017 started a review which led to the publication of an updated strategy on 11 October 2018.

The updated strategy encompasses different sectors and policies, ranging from agriculture to climate, from research to fisheries, and others, and aims to strengthen the connections between economy, society and the environment, thus maximising the contribution of a sustainable bioeconomy to the Commission priorities and to many of its policy objectives.

Pesticides minor use

The presidency will draw the Council's attention to the issue of the long-term funding of the EU Minor Uses Coordination Facility (EUMUCF - 14703/19).

The EUMUCF was set up in 2015 jointly by the European Commission, France, Netherlands and Germany with the aim of addressing the problem of minor use of pesticides. These are uses on niche crops with a high economic value for farmers or exceptional limited uses in a major crop, but usually of low economic interest for the agro-pesticide industry.

Since 15 April 2018 the MUCF is fully depending on voluntary financial contributions from EU Members. At the Minor Uses Annual General Meeting in 2019 it was decided to explore the possibility to discuss the issue of the long-term funding of the MUCF at Council level.