



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



## **Council Conclusions on the Commission communication "towards a better targeting of the aid to farmers in areas with natural handicaps"**

*2952nd AGRICULTURE and FISHERIES Council meeting  
Luxembourg, 22 and 23 June 2009*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council:

1. RECALLING the revision of the support scheme for less-favoured areas (LFAs) undertaken by the Council in the framework of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 and its request made to the Commission in 2005 to present a report and legislative proposals aimed at adapting the LFA delimitation and payment system to the revised policy objectives set out in that Regulation;
2. RECALLING the findings of the Court of Auditors on the support scheme for LFAs under the Community's rural development policy, in particular with regard to the widely diverging methods used by Member States for designating intermediate LFAs
3. TAKES NOTE OF the Commission's Communication entitled "Towards a better targeting of the aid to farmers in areas with natural handicaps", which reports on the work accomplished by the Commission so far and seeks to involve Member States with a view to further analytical work in preparation for a future legislative proposal;
4. NOTES the objective and scientific approach taken by the Commission in developing a common methodology for identifying in a simple and transparent way areas affected by significant natural handicaps and ACKNOWLEDGES the cooperation between Commission and Member States experts so far;

# **P R E S S**

5. RECOGNIZES that the eight biophysical criteria set out in the technical annex to the Communication provide a basis for developing a simple and comparable system for future LFA designation. These criteria relate to:
  - climate (low temperature, heat stress);
  - soil (drainage, texture and stoniness, rooting depth, chemical properties);
  - soil and climate (soil moisture balance);
  - terrain (slope);
6. STRESSES that technical exchanges must continue between the Commission and the Member States in order to examine any further scientific evidence and relevant natural handicaps in outermost regions provided by Member States;
7. NOTES that the methodology in the Communication also provides for a first approach for further fine-tuning of the LFA delimitation, either by applying production-related indicators or by taking account of functioning drainage and/or irrigation, in order to exclude, according to specific circumstances at regional or local level, those areas where natural handicaps have been overcome;
8. RECOGNIZES that, with a view to assessing the precise impact on the ground of the methodology suggested in the Communication on a detailed territorial scale, the Commission needs the active involvement of the relevant Member States' authorities;
9. AGREES therefore that Member States should:
  - carry out on their territory simulations based on the relevant biophysical criteria set out in the Communication, at the administrative level LAU2 or as close as possible to that level;
  - apply the appropriate fine-tuning in order to exclude those areas where the natural handicaps have been overcome;
  - produce maps of the areas that would be eligible under such simulations and submit them to the Commission by 31 January 2010;
10. STRESSES that Member States may provide additional maps showing the application of additional criteria and/or thresholds, as well as other alternative and/or additional fine-tuning indicators which they may consider appropriate, including maps of areas where less than 66% of utilised agricultural land is affected by natural handicaps;

11. UNDERLINES that the sole aim of the simulations is to contribute to further analytical work to be carried out by the Commission on the different review options and that Member States' readiness to carry out simulations in no way constitutes a judgement on the methodology set out in the Communication nor pre-empts the future LFA delimitation. The final discussion about the future of the LFA delimitation system will follow after having evaluated the simulation results;
  12. STRESSES that the future delimitation of intermediate LFAs should meet the objective of the measure, inter alia targeting support at those areas affected by significant natural handicaps and where maintaining extensive farming activity is important for the management of the land;
  13. INVITES the Commission, when developing a future legislative proposal for a new LFA delimitation, to provide for the necessary flexibility, including an appropriate phasing-out of LFA support in those areas which might no longer be considered as less favoured."
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