

**DR. CAROLINE LUCAS**

**Green Member of the European Parliament  
for the South East of the UK**

Commissioner Byrne  
Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection  
200 rue de la Loi  
B-1049 Brussels

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Dear Commissioner Byrne,

**Broiler Chickens**

The new Report on Broiler Chickens by the EU's Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) shows that the intensive broiler industry inflicts serious health and welfare problems on the birds.

The Scientific Committee makes it clear that the industry's drive to ever faster growth rates leads to painful leg disorders, ascites (a form of heart disease) and sudden-death-syndrome in the birds reared for their meat, as well as severe food restriction and hunger in the breeding flock. In addition, it is clear from the report that many broilers are kept in severely overcrowded conditions.

I am writing to you to urge that you produce a Directive designed to address the serious health and welfare problems highlighted by the SCAHAW's Report on Broilers and look forward to receiving your response in due course. Please find enclosed for your interest a second sheet which briefly outlines some of the above mentioned problems.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Lucas MEP

## **Leg Disorders**

Modern Broilers have been bred to reach their slaughter weight in just 41 days, which is twice as fast as 35 years ago. What grows quickly is the muscle, which is what is eaten as meat. The legs, however, fail to keep pace with the rapid body growth and so cannot properly support the overdeveloped body.

The SCAHAW Report concludes that, as a result, many broilers suffer from painful leg disorders which, says the SCAHAW, "are a major cause of poor welfare in broilers". The leg disorders result in impaired walking ability.

## **Heart Problems**

The Scientific Committee concludes that fast rates also lead to ascites ( a form of heart disease) which "has increased in recent years" and sudden-death-syndrome, which is described by the Committee as "an acute heart failure condition".

## **Overcrowding**

Most broilers are kept in huge windowless sheds which are so overcrowded that, as the birds grow bigger, one can barely see the floor, so thickly is it 'carpeted' with chickens.

In the UK, broilers are commonly stocked at 34 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or even higher at 38 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. Stocking rates in the rest of the EU vary but, according to the SCAHAW, can be as high as 42.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. The SCAHAW Report indicates that the highest acceptable stocking density is around 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and that welfare would be much better if stocking densities were below that figure.

