

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS
Green Party

for the South East of England

Commissioner Kyprianou
DG Consumer and Health Protection
The European Commission
B1049 Brussels
Belgium.

January 23rd 2006

Dear Commissioner,

Given the Commission's official role in supporting Turkey's efforts to control human outbreaks of avian flu, I am writing to express concern about their implementation of some aspects of WHO strategy. I have been distressed, as have many constituents, by the television footage of birds being buried alive in some parts of Turkey. To be clear, given the information available to date, I appreciate the necessity of selective culls to control the spread of avian flu in farmed animals. However, I do object to the way it appears the cull is being carried out in countries such as Turkey. I know this is also of concern to your self and to many European citizens, and note the press release on the DG website.

It is my understanding that Turkey is a signatory to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) guidelines on humane killing for disease control, which specify that animals should suffer immediate death or should be stunned and remain unconscious until death. Yet, images of live birds, bagged and thrown into pits alongside culled birds, have been broadcast across the world. The footage suggests that none of the recommended techniques of inhalation, physical methods or the use of injectable anaesthetics have been used. I also understand that the Turkish authorities have called on people to bury their own birds in order to speed up the cull - increasing even further the possibility that birds be subjected to inhumane treatment. This is contrary to the OIE Guidelines, which read:

All personnel involved in the humane killing of animals should have the relevant skills and competencies.

When animals are killed for disease control purposes, methods used should result in immediate death or immediate loss of consciousness lasting until death; when loss of consciousness is not immediate, induction of unconsciousness should be non-aversive and should not cause anxiety, pain, distress or suffering in the animals.

Furthermore, the decision to ask owners of infected, or possibly infected birds, to take responsibility for burial would appear to increase the risk to humans. Again OIE guidelines stress the importance of *'health and safety of personnel conducting the slaughter'*. Given that all recorded deaths from avian flu have resulted from contact with infected birds, it seems unwise for the Turkish authorities to be pursuing a policy that will increase exposure. The WHO's own

Recommendations, *'Responding to the Avian Influenza Pandemic Threat'*, recognise that *'rural poverty perpetuates high-risk behaviours, including the traditional home-slaughter and consumption of diseased birds'*. This is typical of the areas of Turkey currently witnessing outbreaks of the disease. The same report also notes that *'most affected countries cannot adequately compensate farmers for culled poultry, thus discouraging the reporting of outbreaks in the rural areas where the vast majority of human cases have occurred. Veterinary extension services frequently fail to reach these areas.'*

I hope you will appreciate that the Commission has a special responsibility for the way that avian flu is managed in Turkey. In light of this, I would be grateful if you could advise me of the measure being taken by the Commission to ensure that all bird culls are carried out with a minimum of anxiety, pain, distress or suffering. What steps are being taken to assist Turkey to meet its obligations under the OIE guidelines on humane slaughter, particularly as Turkey will soon be called upon to meet EU animal welfare standards? And what assistance is the Commission providing to Turkey in terms of compensation to bird owners; moving away from a policy of asking people to bury their own birds; and so forth?

I look forward to your early response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Lucas'.

Dr Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.