

Commissioner Fischer Boel
Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development
The European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
Bruxelles, 1040

6th November 2006

Dear Commissioner Fischer Boel,

Re: Review of Directive 1999/74/EC

I am writing to you regarding the review of Directive 1999/74/EC which lays down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens.

In anticipation of the Commission's forthcoming report on this matter I would urge you to endorse a recommendation for the ban on conventional battery cages for egg-laying hens to come into force in 2012, as stated in the Directive.

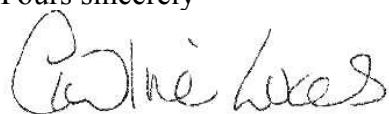
I am aware that EU egg producers are exerting considerable pressure for the cage ban to be postponed. However, in this regard I would draw attention to the fact that the Commission's own socio-economic study on the implications of the 2012 ban found that the costs of switching to more humane methods of keeping egg-laying hens rather than traditional caged production would be minimal. Furthermore, such extra cost as might be incurred is one that the majority of EU citizens are willing to pay. As the report states, a free range egg costs just 2,6 cents more to produce than a battery egg, whilst the cost of producing a barn egg is an extra 1,3 cents. Based on the average per capita consumption of eggs in the EU of 220 per year, even if the costs are passed on directly to the consumer they would pay just 5,5 cents per week should they switch from battery to barn eggs. Given that the increase for individual consumers will be so minimal, it should not be necessary for farmers to bear the higher costs themselves.

As you will be aware, the other major concern within the industry is that the ban on battery cages will cause an increase in imports, particularly of egg products used in processed foods. However, as the Commission's socio-economic report states, imports will only rise by up to 3-4%. At present EU egg imports are very low so this would only represent a very small increase.

I would therefore call upon you to ensure that the Commission both follows scientific advice and acts upon the wish of a majority of EU citizens by strongly advocating the ban on battery cages by 2012 in its upcoming report.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding this matter,

Yours sincerely



Caroline Lucas MEP

(Copy also sent to Kyprianou)