

Dr. Caroline Lucas

Green Party MEP for South East England

Commissioner Markos Kyprianou
Commissioner for Health and Consumer protection
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
Bruxelles 1049

2 May 2006

Dear Commissioner Kyprianou,

URGENT: The role of intensive poultry farming in the spread of avian flu

I am writing to ask the Commission, as part of its research into avian influenza, to urgently give higher priority to investigating the increasing evidence that intensive poultry farming practices, combined with international trade in live poultry and hatching eggs, are a key factor in the spread of the disease.

My concern is that a disproportionate amount of attention is still being paid to migratory wild birds and small-scale poultry farming as the main drivers of the spread, as opposed to the large-scale industrial processes.

This is despite a growing number of reports that the spread of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza has followed human trade routes rather than migratory bird routes; that wild birds have rarely been identified as carrying highly pathogenic strains of influenza, suggesting that they are not efficient vectors of the virus; and that highly pathogenic strains instead evolve in domestic poultry, with industrialised indoor poultry farms providing perfect conditions.

Indeed, the highly respected *Lancet* medical journal had an editorial on precisely this subject on 8 April 2006 which said:

"There is now growing concern that the whirlwind spread of avian flu in some parts of the world is not entirely governed by nature, but by the human activities of commerce and trade. ...Despite extensive testing of wild birds for the disease, scientists have only rarely identified live birds carrying bird flu in a highly pathogenic form, suggesting these birds are not efficient vectors of the virus...Far more likely to be perpetuating the spread of the virus is the movement of poultry, poultry products, or infected material from poultry farms eg animal feed and manure. But this mode of transmission has been down-played by international agencies, who admit that migratory birds are an easy target since nobody is to blame."

I enclose for your information an article I wrote on this matter which was recently published in the Independent newspaper, and a report from GRAIN (www.grain.org/go/birdflu) which gives greater detail on the issues. I shall also shortly be sending you a copy of my own report on these issues.

Clearly, in order to stand the best chance of limiting the disease's impact and preventing a possible human pandemic, we need a thorough understanding of the factors underlying its development and spread. Unfortunately, while the Commission's funding allocation and work programme for research into avian influenza are impressive in their scale, it appears that the role of transnational poultry production and trade is barely being considered. If these processes are as important as many experts believe, this could represent a major oversight with devastating consequences.

I would therefore like to urge the Commission to seriously investigate these reports and devote all the resources necessary to achieve a proper understanding of the threats they describe.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Lucas', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Caroline Lucas
Green Party MEP for South East England

cc. Commissioner Potocnik