



Editorial

The Health check of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been concluded smoothly, without great surprises, and even without too much of the late night horse trading and operetta-style drama that have long been the trademark of CAP negotiations. Ever since the Commission labelled the mid-term review as a “Health check”, it has been shaped as a non-reform and DG Agriculture has invested much effort into assuring Member States and stakeholders that no real changes are on the agenda. The past year’s negotiations and final deal duly followed this uninspired script. BirdLife International has invested much effort in the Health check debate and some modest success can be counted for the environment: modulation and the “New challenges” have survived, albeit in diluted form, and some potentially important improvements have been introduced to cross compliance. These are likely to be partially offset by the loss of set-aside but our work has at least kept this problem on the agenda. On balance, one must judge that the CAP emerges from the exercise pretty much unchanged.

This is very troubling to those, such as BirdLife, who believe that the EU and the world are facing an unprecedented environmental crisis that calls for urgent and radical action and that we cannot afford many more years of wasting taxpayers money while key problems such as biodiversity loss, climate change and water resources depletion go unaddressed. It is also bad news for our wish to see a long term EU commitment to paying farmers and other land managers for the delivery of public goods.

The EU budget review is increasingly shaping up as an assault on the CAP budget by other sectors while the Budget Commissioner has opened up a courageous and honest debate about the rationale of all EU payments. The choice to leave the CAP with the bulk of its budget lacking any clear rationale and without a vision for its future is a huge gamble on the part of both DG Agriculture and the farm lobby.

One further cause for concern emerging from the Health check is the de facto renationalisation of ever more parts of the CAP. From article 68 to cross compliance, each Member State will be more or less free to do as it wishes, with hardly any control over the overall coherence of the resulting policy. This can only strengthen the hand of those who wish to see the end of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Now that the Health check is out of the way, it is time for everyone to seriously engage in the debate over the fundamentals: What is the CAP for? What should it be delivering in the coming years? What are the measures needed to achieve these objectives? If a new widely shared vision does not emerge quickly enough, the CAP may well be swept away by other competing claims on the public purse and at best, will wither away among budget cuts and repatriation of competences to uncoordinated national governments. That would be a pity.

As for the environment, on the short term BirdLife will be putting pressure on national governments to make good use of the increased flexibility they have given themselves and address at least some of the most burning issues through the available tools. Top priorities should be making good use of the limited additional modulation funds, using article 68 to redirect funding towards High Nature Value farming systems and improving cross compliance rules to try and guarantee a minimum of environmental quality across the farmed landscape.

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FARMING FOR LIFE
NEWSLETTER



Biodiversity ill treated by Health check outcomes

Despite taking centre stage as one of the 'new challenges' facing agriculture, the Health check has still managed to fail biodiversity.

The proposal to abolish set-aside, with no meaningful study of the impacts on farmland biodiversity is one of the most misguided actions by the Commission in recent years. In the face of continued declines, the only rational response would have been to introduce Environmental Priority Areas (with 10% of farms managed for biodiversity), but instead Member States accepted 'mitigation' measures within cross compliance that completely fail to retain set-aside's benefits.

One such measure is buffer strips by watercourses which is likely to have negligible biodiversity effects as neither size requirements nor management prescriptions have been specified. Another requirement, concerning protection of specific landscape features, is welcome but deals with protecting existing hedgerows etc, not with offsetting the loss of fallow land. The UK was the only Member State to make set-aside a negotiating priority and managed to secure a change in cross

compliance allowing States to establish or retain habitats if they wanted to. This change has been agreed and, although extremely welcome, is entirely optional. What is missing is a compulsory measure for all EU countries which captures the whole or part-field elements of set-aside. In its absence, the likeliest result is another downward turn for farmland bird populations.



In addition to biodiversity, other priority areas have been identified, including renewable energies and dairy, which must be addressed by Member States. There is a real danger that Member States will focus their attention on issues other than biodiversity, or worse still on projects that

actually harm the environment further.

The Health check also managed to mistreat biodiversity by failing to generate, and target, adequate levels of funding. The 13% modulation rate proposed by the European Commission has been cut to 10%, which is itself significantly less than the 20% suggested in 2002. Progressive modulation of larger farms has also been decimated. Less money means less to spend on schemes to address biodiversity declines. Member States have the option to generate additional funds for environmental projects by using national envelopes (where up to 10% of Pillar I subsidies can be redirected) but the rules governing the scheme are so flexible that Member States could use the mechanism with no positive environment outcomes at all.

If biodiversity is the patient, the architects and sponsors of the Health check have been exceptionally negligent.

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Less Favoured Areas support and High Nature Value farming

DG Agriculture is currently compiling a European Commission Communication on the future of Less Favoured Areas (LFA) support, for publication in spring 2009. This follows a public consultation on LFA support, to which BirdLife International responded in July 2008.

The key issues that the Commission is seeking to address are the re-designation of 'intermediate' LFA according to objective biophysical criteria, removing socio-economic classifications, and the failure of many Member States' LFA schemes to effectively target support, in the right amounts, to the right farms. BirdLife is very concerned that the LFA mechanism is failing to provide adequate support to our very important High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems, which face the twin threats of intensification and abandonment, as they become ever more economically unviable.

HNV encompasses farming systems that are relatively low intensity, low input, often livestock-based, and associated with a high proportion of semi-natural habitat, species richness, or a diverse mosaic of land use and features. It can take many

forms across Europe, but its preservation has become a key challenge for agricultural policy. LFA support could be much more effectively targeted, through the use of eligibility criteria, and appropriate payment levels, to HNV farming systems. BirdLife's input to the current LFA review has highlighted the need for it to deliver



significantly more in terms of environmental benefit to provide it with a robust policy justification, and to ensure its objectives are consistent with its position within the environment/land management axis (Axis 2) of the Rural Development Regulation.

BirdLife International has presented to the Commission detailed examples from across the EU on current failures to protect HNV farming, and our input to the

review process will continue. Changes to LFA support on the ground were originally planned for 2010, but it is increasingly likely that this may now be delayed. Should that happen, this would represent yet another missed opportunity to bring the CAP in line with its stated objectives, and with the public expectation, further undermining its credibility.

See the BirdLife International LFA response at http://www.birdlife.org/eu/Agriculture/eu_agriculture6.html

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Will biofuels actually save emissions?

As discussions have progressed on the role biofuels will play in contributing to 2020 renewable energy targets, much of the debate has focused around indirect land use change.

Biofuels have been promoted as a climate-friendly alternative to conventional oil. However, for most biofuels, alleged greenhouse gas savings generally do not represent reality. Converting land for biofuel production can harm wildlife and local communities but also lead to huge greenhouse gas emissions, for example if peatlands or tropical forests are converted to plantations. The Renewable Energy Directive attempts to address these issues but *indirect* land use change also has a major role to play and until recently this issue has been ignored.

Essentially, as soon as crops or land that would have otherwise been used for producing food or animal feed are used for growing biofuels, indirect emissions occur through the displacement of agriculture to new areas. This is because a large part of the carbon stored in undisturbed natural soils and forests is released as carbon dioxide when the land is cleared and the soil disturbed. Research increasingly indicates that the emissions released through this indirect land-use change could be substantial and outweigh any savings from using biofuels. A recent study commissioned by the UK government (the Gallagher Review) states: "*The balance of evidence*

shows a significant risk that current [biofuel] policies will lead to net greenhouse gas emissions...".

The United States have already recognized the significance of this issue and put in place legislation that calls for direct and indirect emissions from land-use change to be taken into account when calculating the climate performance of biofuels.

However, at the time of writing, methods for addressing indirect land use change remain unresolved in the EU. The Industry committee of the European Parliament voted that the European Commission should develop a methodology to calculate indirect impacts of different biofuel crops and production pathways by the end of 2011. If the Commission fails to perform this task, a modest correction factor should then apply to all biofuels grown on agricultural land from that date on, according to the Parliament. This proposal has had support by some but not all European Council members and the Commission has finally accepted that this is an issue that needs tackling. How these institutions resolve these issues will be key to determining the sustainability of biofuels. Equally key will be the definition and implementation of safeguards to prevent *direct* land change. At the moment, the risk that EU biofuels policy will lead to unintended damaging environmental and social

consequences on a massive scale remains extremely high.

For more information visit

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/rfa/reportsandpublications/reviewoftheindirecteffectsofbiofuels/executivesummary.cfm>

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Date for your diary

11 December 2008

Prague, Czech Republic

BirdLife International conference "The CAP and the EU Budget Review-Visions for the Future"

The conference is organized by the Czech Society for Ornithology (CSO/BirdLife in the Czech Republic) in cooperation with PRO-BIO Association of Ecological Farmers, BirdLife International, the German Marshall Fund of the United States and officially endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic

For more information: <http://www.cso.cz/index.php?ID=1748>



THE BIRDLIFE EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP



The BirdLife European Partnership consists of 42 conservation organisations with 1800 staff, 1.7 million members and more than 6,000 reserves (covering over 300,000 hectares). A European Programme to conserve birds is implemented by Partners with coordination provided by the European Division staff in Brussels (Belgium) working together with the BirdLife Global Secretariat in Cambridge (UK). Many Partners are actively working on agriculture issues connected to bird conservation.

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