Resolution on the EU laying hens industry: the ban on the use of battery cages from 2012

2010/2979(RSP) - 16/12/2010 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 459 votes to 32, with 17 abstentions, a resolution on the EU laying hens industry: the ban on the use of battery cages from 2012.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled as a joint resolution by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, ECR and EFD.

Directive 1999/74/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens prohibits, as from 1 January 2012, the rearing of laying hens in unenriched cage systems, and whereas Member States and producers in the EU-15 will by then have had more than 12 years to ensure that they comply with the terms of the legislation, and producers in the EU-10 and EU-2 will have had respectively eight and five years, since enlargement, to comply.

Stating that many producers in the Union have started to change their production systems in order to comply with Council Directive 1999/74/EC, but will not have completed the process by the 1 January 2012 deadline, Parliament calls on the Commission to maintain the requirement for a ban on battery cages by 1 January 2012, as laid down in Directive 1999/74/EC, and strongly to oppose any attempts by Member States to secure a deferral of that deadline.

The resolution stresses that, as a matter of principle, postponement of the ban or derogations from it would seriously harm the welfare of laying hens, distort the market and penalise those producers who have already invested in non-cage or enriched-cage systems. Parliament believes, nevertheless, that a solution should be found, subject to clearly defined conditions, for those producers who have started to change their rearing systems, by introducing new cages or alternative rearing methods, but who will not have completed this process by 1 January 2012.

The Commission is called upon to monitor progress at frequent intervals and to take urgent action directed at Member States to make sure that their egg producers comply with the ban by 1 January 2012 and to urge them to develop national action plans, including dissuasive sanctions, with a view to ensuring that the use of battery cages is brought to an end on their territory by 1 January 2012.

Parliament points out that non-compliance with Directive 1999/74/EC may give rise to a risk of egg shortages and significant price increases for consumers. Such shortages and price increases could lead to increased imports of eggs or egg products from third countries that do not observe EU welfare standards.

The Commission is asked to:

- step up its monitoring of the enforcement of the directive by means of more frequent inspections by the Food and Veterinary Office;
- submit, at the latest by 31 December 2011, a list of egg and egg-product producers, processors and retailers not complying with the provisions of Directive 1999/74/EC.