Foot and mouth disease: lessons from the 2001 crisis, proposals for the future

2002/2153(INI) - 20/11/2002

The Temporary Committee on Foot and Mouth Disease unanimously adopted the own-initiative report by Wolfgang KREISSL-DÖRFLER (PES, D) on measures to control the disease in the EU in 2001 and future measures to prevent and control animal diseases in the EU. The report said the EU must reverse its current policy of keeping vaccination as a last resort and called for emergency vaccination to be a "first-choice option" in controlling any future outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Vaccination aimed at keeping animals alive should be considered from the outset, hand-in-hand with the immediate requirement of slaughtering livestock on infected farms and known dangerous contacts. The committee also wanted a ban on imports from non-EU countries where foot and mouth disease is endemic and much tougher action against illegal meat imports, which it identified as the most likely source of the disease's entry into the EU. Moreover, it believed the Community should "be in a position to play an essential role in the determination of the strategy for controlling FMD". The report advocated a shift in emphasis in EU policy away from purely commercial considerations. Animal welfare concerns and the social and psychological impact on the community at large of outbreaks like the ones seen in 2001 must be factored in. The report noted that "mass culling of livestock and the subsequent destruction of meat resulted in widespread public protests" and that "mass culling on the scale seen in the UK and the Netherlands will not be publicly acceptable again and that alternative control strategies are therefore essential". The committee said that trade policy must be altered to prevent discrimination against products from vaccinated livestock and compensation must in future be paid for the losses suffered by other sectors, in addition to farming, such as tourism. It wanted the system of compensation for losses arising from FMD to be decided at European level in future and to apply to all Member States. It called on the Commission to consider the options of an insurance scheme or a guarantee fund in future to cover part of the costs for FMD and other livestock diseases borne by the EU budget. As well as issuing new EU policy recommendations designed to prevent a foot and mouth epidemic from ever occurring again, the committee also looked at the management of the crisis in the Member States affected. It concluded that bureaucracy, delays in decision-making and the lack of effective contingency plans had caused problems in the UK. In the Netherlands, time had been lost in tackling the crisis at regional level, capacity had at times been insufficient to carry out the control measures and not enough attention had been paid to the views of the people affected in the regions concerned.