



Lid van het Europees Parlement

To Mr. Vytenis Andriukaitis, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety  
and Mr. Phil Hogan, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

CC: Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, Commission President

Mr. Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament

Subject: Animal welfare - our written questions on foie gras

Dear Mr. Andriukaitis and Mr. Hogan,

Brussels, 2 March 2017

Over the past few years, we have tried to put the issue of animal welfare during foie gras production on the political agenda, mainly through submitting various written questions to the Commission.

Unfortunately, the outcome of these questions has been a series of unclear and inconsistent answers. We strongly believe that our attempts over the years to improve the welfare of ducks and geese used in foie gras production are fully in line with existing EU legislation on animal welfare and with Article 13 TFEU, and we regret that the Commission seems unable to take a clear stance on this important issue.

Therefore, we take the opportunity of writing you this letter. We call upon the Commission to include the topic of force-feeding in foie gras production among its priorities, to achieve full compliance with existing EU legislation on farm animal welfare and to respond to citizens' concerns on this cruel practice.

Foie gras production by force-feeding remains a highly controversial practice to which many citizens across the EU oppose. Although a large majority of EU Member States has already banned this practice following the implementation of Directive 58/98/EC, it is still permitted in five Member States. This situation seems exclusively based on the assumption that the exception set in the 1999 Council of Europe Recommendations prevails over the clear content of Directive 58/98/EC.

Our preferred choice would be to end force-feeding altogether. An alternative option however, which can be easily implemented, would be to make the production of foie gras without force-feeding possible, by deleting the minimum liver weights stated in Article 1, point 3, of Regulation (EC) No 543/2008.

Indeed, maintaining these minimum weight requirements de facto renders alternatives to force-feeding in foie gras production impossible. All available independent scientific evidence makes it clear that these weights are unnatural and arguably unattainable without force-feeding.

This is penalising both animals and EU farmers who do not force-feed their animals. Retaining the minimum weights seems to be exclusively in the interest of only a few companies within the EU, and increasingly those that operate in third countries such as China and Ukraine. Ironically, lower or non-existent animal welfare standards in those third countries offers them better access to the EU market than that reserved for producers in 23 EU Member States.

It is therefore important to recall that Member States such as Poland and Italy, who have banned force-feeding, find themselves now in a weaker position than some third countries because of the minimum liver weights set in Regulation (EC) No 543/2008.

We call upon the Commission to change this flawed situation as soon as possible and sincerely hope you can consider our suggestions.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincere regards,

Mark Demesmaeker (ECR), Julie Girling (ECR), Stefan Eck (GUE/NGL), Keith Taylor (Greens/EFA), Catherine Bearder (ALDE), Isabella De Monte (S&D), Marlene Mizzi (S&D), Fabio Massimo Castaldo (EFDD), Estefania Torres Martinez (GUE/NGL), Sirpa Pietikainen (EPP), Bart Staes (Greens/EFA), Petras Austrevicius (ALDE), Renate Sommer (EPP), Pascal Durand (Greens/EFA), Nicola Caputo (S&D), Pascal Arimont (EPP), Stelios Kouloglou (GUE/NGL) and Karin Kadenbach (S&D)