

# Meeting of the sub-group on animal welfare labelling

Fourth meeting, 22 June 2022  
(Videoconference)

– MINUTES –

## Attendance

<b>Independent expert</b>	Jarkko Niemi
<b>Civil society organisations</b>	Eurogroup for animals FOUR PAWS
<b>Business and professional organisations</b>	COPA EMN ERPA (excused) FVE
<b>Member States</b>	Denmark Germany Spain
<b>European Commission</b>	SANTE G5 (Chair)
<b>Guests</b>	ICF

## Discussions

The meeting was dedicated to option 3 of the inception impact assessment on animal welfare labelling: An EU label with key welfare criteria.

### 1. Description of option 3: An EU label with key welfare criteria

The Chair reminded shortly the fourth problems areas (see attached presentation) and presented the three sub-options with voluntary single tier (V1), voluntary multi-tier (VM) and mandatory multi-tier (MM).

Whatever sub-option proposed, it would include key welfare criteria (beyond housing contrary to option 2), as well as rules on governance, controls, and trade.

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the principles of the option. Future meetings would explore more in details the other aspects.

## 2. Impacts of the option on the problems

Following a question on the precise *meaning of mandatory labelling*, the Chair explained the main difference between VM and MM is related to the coverage of products. In case of a voluntary label, only the operators that apply for the scheme would follow the rules established. In case of a mandatory label, the coverage would be extended to all products on the EU market. It means that a mandatory label would cover upgraded standards (like a voluntary system) but also the ones that are compliant with EU rules as well as the ones where there is not enough information available (for imported products).

On the impact on **consumers coverage** (P1) members were divided.

Several members consider that there would be no substantial difference between the sub-options. One member said that a voluntary label would have better impact because farmers would be encouraged to embark in such scheme. Another member confirmed that position because in case of VM retailers would push for any products to be labelled. In addition, in case of VM, consumers have already the information implicitly and so a mandatory label would not really extend the coverage of information.

Several other members disagreed and stated that MM would have much better impact in addressing P1 because the percentage of products covered would be higher. Voluntary labels would only cover part of the market and a mandatory label would have a broader impact. A member mentioned that this is why Germany has chosen to go for a mandatory system.

On the impact of **information quality** (P2) members were also divided.

On one hand some members considered that VM offers the best quality of information because MM needs simplified controls. The Chair intervened by stating that we should not confuse VM with private standards because the legislation VM or MM would not be as detailed as a private standard so the level of details would not be different. Another member considered that because under VM stakeholders would take better ownership of the label, they would be more involved in developing more visibility and quality to the information provided. Another member explained that a label contains two different aspects, one technical and one related to the communication to the consumer. While the label would stay the same, technical standards would evolve overtime. In this way, VM has a better flexibility than V1 in providing information quality.

On the other hand, other members considered that MM would better address information quality because it also indicates the products that are solely complying with basic standards. Hence it offers a better visibility and clarity between upgraded and basic products. One member also considered that VM might decrease information quality because it could be added to existing schemes, increasing the confusion among consumers between schemes outside the EU label and schemes that would integrate the EU label. However, one member objected that in Denmark [where there is legislation on a voluntary label], they did not have such experience of consumer confusion.

On the impact of the **uneven playing field (P3)**, one member considered that there is no difference between V1 and VM. We should not assume that, under VM most of the producers would go for the lowest level. In the case of the Danish experience, most of them went to the highest level for pig production while this was not the case in the NL with the Beter Leven scheme. Another member also mentioned that the impact of V1 would depend on how high or low are the standards compared to the basic legislation. If the V1 standards is slightly higher than the basic standards, then V1 would not address P3 enough and in this case multi-tier systems would be better. Another member did not see the difference on the impact on P3 between VM and MM. Another member agreed but still believed that there is a slight advantage for MM. Another member thought that

V1 would have little effect, and VM a better effect but MM would be slightly better than VM. The members did not explain precisely what leads them to such conclusions.

The Chair explained that under their current working hypothesis, they see V1 as a very high standard comparable to organic or Eco-label rather than the possibility for a slightly above the minimum standards.

On the impact of **renationalisation** (P4), one member believed that V1 would be counterproductive and would not have a positive impact in addressing the problem. This member considered that because V1 do not fit with the current market demand, stakeholders would not use it and would continue to use their existing standards. So, labels would continue to be developed on a national basis. The same member also considered that MM would less address P4 because insufficient commitment from the industry. Another member shared the view that any possibility to go further from an EU label would increase the risk of national fragmentation of the market. This member believed that it is therefore important to strictly limit the capacity of each Member State to go further, whatever sub-option chosen. Another member, on the other side, considered that the best would be VM with a certain flexibility so that each country can valorise their own specificities. Another member considered that voluntary sub-options contain a higher risk of fragmentation because of the possibility to have existing schemes in parallel. Another member referred to the MOP+ project indicating that producers would tend to embark to the less requiring schemes because it is simpler and cheaper, hence the risk of fragmentation would be higher with VM than with MM. Another member concluded that, whatever option, the experience in DK indicated that the current situation makes complicated to valorise the efforts achieved under a nationally based label and vice-et-versa. It is therefore important that an EU label is put in place.

On the impact on **non-EU import** (P5), one member considered that MM is the best sub-option to address the problem. This view was shared by many members. Following a question of one member, the Chair declared that under all the sub-options, producers from non-EU countries would be able to apply to the EU label if they comply with the corresponding conditions. However, one member considered that this was not enough, and that non-EU import should fully comply with EU requirements. The same member believed that an EU label should not be accessible to non-EU countries producers. The Chair explained that this option was most probably not in line with the EU international obligations. Another member considered that VM would be better than MM to address P5. Similarly, another member did not understand why MM would be better than VM to address P5.

### 3. Other impacts

#### Impacts on operators

One member declared that MM would not impose additional burden for operators but simply organise the market in a more transparent way. It could also be used within a business-to-business context. In this way, MM is the best option for operators.

Another member believed that voluntary schemes create a strong motivation to producers and so VM remain the best option for farmers. This member mentioned that MM like the egg system was perceived as “forcing” producers to adhere to a system without benefits or real incentives for them. Another member supported this view, adding that VM create a better visibility, motivation, and opportunity for price differential than MM where all products would be labelled.

Another member wanted to know who would pay for controls and how the system would be ran because this would have an important impact on operators.

Another member referred to the current debate in Germany where there was today an overall agreement among stakeholders for a mandatory label. This statement was confirmed by another

member indicating that MM was widely backed in Germany. A member suggested that the group should receive more information on the German labelling project.

Another member considered that VM creates a bigger contrast than MM and so give more opportunity for producers to get a fairer share of a price premium. This position was supported by another member who stated that costs wise, all sub-options generate similar costs in terms of compliance and administrative burden. However, this member believed that VM would offer better benefits for operators.

A member added that VM would create a less stable environment. The argument was then challenged by another member because the discussion on stability is more related to the divide private/legislative label rather than VM vs MM.

Another member considered that MM would actually help farmers in make better visible their compliance in some issues like tail docking.

#### **Impact on public authorities (EU and national)**

One member believed that MM would create huge costs for the EU and national authorities. This member insisted on the fact that costs also include promotion and in absence of involvement of stakeholders this would require more resources. Another member stated that there would be not much difference between VM and MM on costs for the authorities because the management of a label would be more or less the same. Another member agreed that, whatever sub-option, this would generate running costs both from technical, administrative and communication point of view. The main question is about who would bear mostly the costs. Another member stated that VM would be cheaper to implement because of the possibility to use certification body. However, the Chair said that this was not correct because the possibility to delegate controls could apply for any kind of controls and the choice of delegating inspection or certification depends on each Member State.

#### **Impact on animals**

The Chair reminded the group of the outcomes of the study on animal welfare labelling. The study indicated that the impacts on animals of existing schemes is difficult to establish in absence of clear benchmark and systematic data. However, it seems that existing labels provide better controls but tend to favour standards slightly above the legislation, making the impact on welfare limited.

A member considered that MM would have the best impact for improving the welfare of animals because it would cover all products and create a stronger incentive for producers to move towards higher standards. However, the same member said that the effects should not be taken in isolation because the impact would largely depend on the standards proposed, the intensity and the regularity of the promotion campaigns. This view was supported by another member.

Other members considered that multi-tier would have a better impact by creating a progressive incentive for farmers to improve their practice. They also insisted on taking a rather a positive approach (VM) rather than, what they consider, a negative approach (MM) to promote animal welfare among farmers. The same members consider that MM, by forcing all producers to embark on a scoring system, would be perceived as a sanction and it will have negative effects on their interest for upgraded standards.

#### **4. Next steps and any other business**

The Chair reminded the members that the next meeting will take place on 26 September and the following meetings after summer will be the opportunity to discuss more into deep how a common framework across species could be established.

The group agreed to have an update on the German situation on animal welfare labelling for the next meeting and one member offered to do it.

A member asked how the current work would not conflict with the ongoing work on sustainable labelling where the PEF (product environmental footprint) could be at the basis of the new system. Another member asked to receive the link of the forthcoming plenary EU animal welfare platform. Another member suggested to receive the presentation in advance.