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EU extends electronic ID deadline for sheep and goats to January 2010



Sheep and goat tags will be compulsory in the EU by January 2010
Photo: Marja Flick-Buijs

The EU Council of Ministers has postponed the implementation date of mandatory electronic identification (EID) for sheep and goats to January 2010.

Under Article 9(3) of Regulation (EC) No 21/2004, electronic identification for sheep and goats should have come into force on 1 January 2008.

The decision, delivered on 13 December 2007, was backed by the United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland and Slovakia.

"The UK supports a deferment of the introduction of compulsory electronic identification for sheep and goats," said the UK delegation. "However, given the period of time that has elapsed since the agreement of the original Regulation, the UK calls on the Commission to revise its impact assessment, taking into account the cost to industry and enforcement bodies, and the impact of Regulation (EC) 21/2004 on the competitiveness of the EU sheep & goat industry, in order to confirm, before the entry into force of EID, whether the objectives of the regulation are being met in the most cost-effective way."

The newly adopted regulation was opposed by the Spanish and Italian delegations, who expressed "dissatisfaction" with the postponement and "the reasoning behind the technical discussions in that connection".

Regulation 21/2004, which introduces, amongst other measures, a system of individual animal recording and electronic identification for sheep and goats for supply chain traceability and disease monitoring, was adopted on 17 December 2003.

Member states were expected to have adopted the measures necessary to meet the 2008 deadline. The move, however, was met with opposition from certain quarters of the livestock industry. In the UK, resistance came mainly from the sheep industry, which objects to the cost of implementation.

Spain and Italy were not amused by the failure of other member states to meet the deadline.

They stated: "In order to prepare for that date as well as possible, Italy and Spain committed considerable financial and human resources to the project. For all those efforts, the effectiveness of their national measures has been reduced by failure to achieve the same result at Community level.

"Even taking into account the difficulties reported by some member states in adopting electronic identification by the deadlines laid down in the regulation, the reasons given for the technical and economic problems standing in the way of the introduction of electronic identification by 2008 appear hard to accept, and in particular, cannot be addressed by allowing the timetable to slip as proposed.

"Postponement of the introduction of electronic identification until 31 December 2009 also means putting off until that date the fulfilment of other obligations under the regulation, thus making it in practice difficult to apply – and of little use – with the inevitable consequences for the registration of sheep and goats overall."

The UK Animal Welfare Minister Jeff Rooker, on the contrary, welcomed the postponement.

"Securing a delay until 31 December 2009 for implementation is a significant achievement and will give our industry two years longer than was originally agreed to adjust to the introduction of EID," he said.

"We do still have concerns about the cost and practicalities of introducing EID, and these are recognized in the Commission's report. We will continue to work in close partnership with industry to discuss the implementation of EID in a way which is practical and industry can make work. We will also be seeking further amendments to the regulation to limit the impact of the introduction of the individual recording requirements which exists for older animals."

Despite the deferment of the deadline, the Council backs the future establishment of a single Community legal framework for the 2007-2013 EU-wide animal health strategy.

The legal framework will be derived from "progressive harmonization" of animal health measures and disease surveillance, diagnosis and control, including animal welfare and "identification of animals irrespective of their purpose".

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A research flock at the US Sheep Experiment Station near Dubois, Idaho, USA. Unlike their USA counterparts, the EU member states still disagree over the implementation of sheep and goat tags
Photo: USDA

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