
For Written Answer on : 23/07/2019
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Department: Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Asked by: Brendan Smith T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Agriculture; Food and the Marine if he has had recent discussions with the French authorities in relation to the need to increase lairage facilities at Cherbourg; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

REPLY

Live exports are a critical part of Ireland's livestock industry. They play a significant role in stimulating price competition and providing an alternative market outlet for farmers. My Department facilitates this trade, recognising its importance to the agri-food sector, while placing a strong emphasis on the welfare of all animals being transported.

In 2018, total live exports of cattle increased by over 30% compared to 2017, to 246,000 head. This growth trend has continued into 2019, with live exports already totalling 229,000 up until the week ending the 14th of July. This is up from 179,000 for the same period in 2018 – a 28% increase.

This increase is in part down to my decision in 2017 to reduce the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves less than three months of age from €4.80 to €1.20 which brought greater equity to the inspection fee regime. Since then, there has been continued growth in the export of calves, rising from 102,000 in 2017 to 159,000 in 2018. We have already surpassed this figure in 2019, with 187,000 calves exported in the year to date.

Development of additional lairage capacity in Cherbourg is a commercial matter for the export sector. Officials from my Department met their French counterparts recently in Cherbourg and, during these discussions, the French authorities indicated that they would be willing to consider applications submitted for additional lairage capacity should they arise. This has proved possible – as evidenced by the French authorities approving an increase of the holding capacity of the Qualivia lairage in Cherbourg earlier this year. My Department worked closely with the French authorities in this matter. The move provided for additional daily capacity for 400 animals, providing increased capacity of some 1,200 animals per week.

In my meetings with live exporters, I have suggested that a representative group be set up to represent their interests with a view to enhancing co-ordination in relation to the live export trade. The Deputy will be aware that the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Agriculture, Food and the Marine's recent 'Report on the future of the Beef Sector in the context of Food Wise 2025' also makes this recommendation.