Securing Competitive Livestock Transport Access for Ireland

An urgent Irish–EU response under the EU Livestock Strategy

To: Martin Heydon TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Darragh O'Brien TD, Minister for Transport; Christophe Hansen, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Food; Apostolos Tzitzikostas, European Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism

Date: 6 August 2026
Priority: Immediate
Deadline at risk: 1 September 2026

Urgent request

IrelandCattlePrice.com requests the immediate creation of a joint Irish–EU Livestock Transport Resilience Taskforce, with a funded and welfare-compliant contingency option secured before 1 September 2026. Brittany Ferries has confirmed that it will stop carrying live farmed animals from Ireland to France by 1 September 2026 at the latest. Irish Ferries will then be the sole operator providing this market access. This is not a request to rescue or favour any named company. It is a request for an operator-neutral response to a structural market-access risk facing an island Member State.

Why action cannot wait: Brittany Ferries' withdrawal leaves one livestock-capable carrier; 253,836 animals were exported from Ireland to continental EU markets in 2025, and 228,528 had already been exported in 2026 by 4 August. Capacity loss therefore affects a substantial, active trade—not a hypothetical future market.

Why this is an EU Livestock Strategy issue

The EU Livestock Strategy, adopted on 7 July 2026, commits the Union and Member States to a resilient, competitive and sustainable livestock sector that reflects territorial diversity, supports rural vitality, strengthens food security and improves strategic autonomy. Ireland's dependence on sea transport makes access to continental livestock markets a structural policy issue. The strategy's commitments are directly engaged in six ways:

- **Resilience:** One remaining operator creates a single point of failure. Disruption, vessel unavailability, industrial action or commercial withdrawal could sharply restrict access to continental markets.
- **Competitiveness:** Live exports provide an alternative outlet for calves, weanlings and breeding stock. Reduced capacity weakens buyer competition and can increase farmers' dependence on domestic purchasers.
- **Territorial diversity and cohesion:** Ireland cannot access the continental Single Market by road. Article 174 TFEU requires particular attention to islands and regions facing permanent geographical constraints.
- **Food security and strategic autonomy:** A robust intra-EU livestock supply chain requires secure, predictable and diversified transport links—not reliance on a single commercial provider.
- **Rural vitality:** The trade supports farms, marts, exporters, assembly centres, hauliers, veterinary services and rural employment across multiple regions.
- **Animal welfare:** Capacity shortages can create delays, longer alternative routes and seasonal congestion. Any intervention must guarantee full compliance with EU transport law and measurable welfare safeguards.

Decisions requested from the Irish Government and European Commission

1. Convene the taskforce within seven days.

Include the Departments of Agriculture and Transport, DG AGRI, DG MOVE, DG SANTE, ports, ferry operators, exporters, hauliers, veterinary authorities, marts, farmer representatives and recognised animal-welfare organisations.

2. Publish an independent capacity and risk assessment by 21 August 2026.

Quantify current sailings, livestock-lorry capacity, seasonal demand, welfare constraints, route alternatives, operational bottlenecks and the consequences of disruption to the remaining operator.

3. Secure minimum livestock capacity before 1 September 2026.

Use a transparent expression of interest for a second licensed operator, reserve-capacity arrangement, seasonal minimum-capacity agreement, or another competitive mechanism. A public-service-style contract should be considered only where market failure is demonstrated and EU law permits it.

4. Identify the lawful funding route.

Assess national co-financing and the eligibility of relevant EU transport, agricultural, cohesion or crisis instruments. Where compensation is required, design it transparently and in accordance with State-aid and public-service rules. No particular fund should be presumed eligible without formal assessment.

5. Make animal welfare a binding condition.

Require approved livestock vehicles, qualified personnel, ventilation, water and feeding arrangements, journey planning, inspections, contingency unloading/rest facilities, incident reporting and enforceable capacity limits under Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 and any applicable successor rules. In particular, the taskforce must resolve the feeding-interval compliance question for unweaned calves through approved on-board or port feeding arrangements, journey planning or cohort restrictions, so that any secured capacity is demonstrably lawful under Regulation (EC) No 1/2005.

6. Prepare for failure of the remaining route.

Put in place a documented emergency plan covering vessel disruption, disease controls, port closure, extreme weather and peak spring calf movements, including named decision-makers and rapid communication to exporters and farmers.

7. Publish a durable spring 2027 plan by 31 October 2026.

The solution must extend beyond an immediate September stopgap and provide predictable, competitively procured and welfare-compliant access for the next export season.

Public accountability and ICP's contribution

IrelandCattlePrice.com will create a public evidence page titled "Protect Ireland's Live-Export Route". It will track confirmed operators and dates, export volumes and destinations, official statements, affected marts and regions, farmer-reported impacts, measurable price effects and the timeline of Irish and EU decisions. Personal and commercially sensitive information will be anonymised or aggregated. ICP is prepared to provide this evidence to the taskforce and publish progress against clear milestones.

> **"The EU cannot promise a resilient and competitive livestock sector while allowing an island Member State to depend on a single livestock ferry route to continental Europe."**

Requested response

Please confirm by 13 August 2026: (a) the lead Irish department; (b) whether a joint taskforce will be convened; (c) the date for publication of the capacity assessment; and (d) the process for securing a second or reserve livestock-capable service before 1 September 2026.

Submitted by: Brendan Kennedy, drystock beef farmer and founder of IrelandCattlePrice.com, County Tipperary.

Evidence and legal references

1. EU Livestock Strategy (7 July 2026)
2. RTÉ: Brittany Ferries withdrawal (4 August 2026)
3. Irish Examiner/Bord Bia export volumes
4. EU maritime public-service obligations
5. Article 174 TFEU and Regulation 1/2005 / animal-transport law
6. Unweaned-calf feeding intervals and journey planning under Regulation 1/2005