



Minutes of the meeting of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at
AFBI Newforge (Headquarters), Belfast
on Wednesday 25 June 2008 at 10.00 am

Present:

Board members

Mr Sean Hogan, Chairperson
Professor David McDowell, Deputy Chairperson
Mr Kieran Campbell
Dr Christine Kennedy
Mr John McKinley
Professor Stewart McNulty
Mr John Rankin
Mr Michael Walker
Mr James Noble
Dr Michael Hollywood

In Attendance: Dr Seamus Kennedy, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Acting Accounting Officer
Dr Michael Camlin, Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Dr Robin Boyd, Head of Chief Executive's Office
Mr Stephen Dolan, Head of Business Support Unit
Mr Stephen Cousins (Secretary)

Apologies: Mr Nick Mack
Professor Grace Mulachy
Dr George McIlroy, Chief Executive Officer
Dr Sydney Neill, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Welcome and Introduction

Mr Hogan welcomed all those present and thanked all for attending.

In his opening comments Mr Hogan made reference to Dr McIlroy's absence and informed the Board that while Dr McIlroy is recovering he had not as yet resumed his full range of duties. However, a particular welcome was given to Dr Seamus Kennedy who was attending not only in his position as DCEO but also as the Acting Accounting Officer.

Mr Hogan also took the opportunity to advise the Board that he had recently been appointed to the Board of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding

Company and confirmed that this would not interfere with any of his AFBI commitments.

The Board congratulated Mr Hogan on his appointment.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 May 2008

It was proposed by Professor McNulty and seconded by Mr Rankin that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 May 2008 be accepted subject to the following:

- That reference to the next AFBI Board Open Meeting appeared to have been omitted and should be included as an agenda item for the September Board meeting.
- That future minutes identify and record relevant “*action points*”.
- That a collective page of all the “*action points*” be included at the back of the minutes.

Action: Board Secretariat to note all three points and arrange accordingly.

2. Matters Arising from the previous meeting held on 29 May 2008

The majority of the matters arising were either completed or would be dealt with as part of the agenda however an update was provided with regard to the following:

2.1 Item 2.6 – Appointment of a Business Manager

Mr Ferguson to be invited to make a presentation to the Board possibly in August 2008.

It was noted that this was still on schedule.

Action: Secretariat to check position and make arrangements if necessary.

2.2 Item 4.5.3 – Development Strategies

Consultancy reports to be issued to the Board.

Dr Boyd apologised for the oversight.

Action: Dr Boyd to circulate reports to Board members.

2.3 Item 5 – Report from Audit Committee – 29 April 2008

Secretariat to ensure that all papers submitted to the Board have a cover sheet identifying the action required e.g. approval, for information etc.

Secretary will discuss points of detail with the respective Board Member.

Action: Secretary to discuss and arrange in respect of future papers.

3. Report from Chief Executive's Office

3.1 Draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2008-09 to 2010-11

Dr Boyd referred to the draft AFBI Corporate Plan for 2008-09 to 2010-11 that had been circulated to Board members in advance of the meeting.

Dr Boyd confirmed that the draft Corporate Plan had been discussed with AFBI Sponsor Branch (ASB) during a recent meeting and ASB suggested that the Plan needed to be more commercially orientated. Having made the suggested changes the revised draft had been circulated to the Board and forwarded to ASB. Given that it is likely further changes will be suggested by DARD, Dr Boyd recommended that the Board should approve the draft Plan as presented on the basis that any suggested changes will be minor. However, if this was not the case he would refer the matter back to the Board.

It was proposed by Dr C Kennedy and seconded by Mr Walker that the draft Plan be approved on the basis that any changes suggested by DARD are minor and there will be a tracked version of the draft Plan available for Board members to compare.

Action: Dr Boyd to note AFBI Board approval and forward the draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2008-09 to 2010-11 to DARD/DFP for formal ratification.

3.2 Renewables Conference

Dr Boyd informed the Board that plans for the renewables conference were progressing well. Dr Boyd acknowledged the fact that some aspects of the event have not progressed as planned however, the AFBI Executive remain confident that the event will be a success.

In relation to sponsorship the next main event will be an AFBI breakfast to be hosted in AFBI Headquarters, Newforge on the 4 July 2008 when approximately twelve potential sponsors will be invited to attend. As

well as the AFBI Executive those hosting the event will include the AFBI Board Chair, Mr Hogan and the AFBI Board Deputy Chair, Prof McDowell.

Follow-up leads are also being pursued in relation to the various contacts and good work carried out by the Chair.

Commenting on Dr Boyd's report the Chair, Mr Hogan advised the Board that the Company involved in assisting AFBI to attain its sponsorship targets was confident of doing so. Mr Hogan also stated that he was confident that the event would be a success and present AFBI with a platform to raise its profile locally and internationally. Mr Hogan also confirmed that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive were still "*on board*".

In the general discussion that followed some members of the Board indicated that while the Board is kept informed on a strategic level in order that it may support this event there were concerns at the lack of more detailed information particularly in relation to the costs and as a Board it would be unwise not to voice such concerns.

In response Dr Boyd advised the Board that after 4 July 2008 the AFBI Executive would be able to provide more substantial details regarding costs.

Mr Dolan also advised the Board that the budget for the event was based upon straight expenditure and outlined the various packages and costs per delegate that are currently being considered including early booking incentives. The AFBI Executive were also considering other ways of raising sponsorship by offering the opportunity to sponsor surrounding events such as e.g. conference dinner, delegates pack etc.

With regard to publicity Dr Boyd informed the Board that the website relating to the event is currently in the final stages of development and should be fully active by 4 July 2008. Information relating to the programme including a list of speakers and an itinerary will also be made available via the website.

Dr S Kennedy informed members of the Board that all of the comments were very valuable and the concerns of the Board would be addressed by the AFBI Executive. Dr S Kennedy reaffirmed that there was a high degree of confidence within the AFBI Executive Team and advised the Board that there were contingency arrangements in place.

It was agreed that a briefing paper would be presented to the Board before the end of July and this would include a financial breakdown of all the costs associated with the event.

Action: AFBI Executive to provide Board members with a brief including a financial breakdown of all of the costs associated with the event.

3.3 Consultancy Reports

Dr Boyd apologised for not having issued the various consultancy reports to Board members as agreed at the last meeting but reassured members that this would be done as soon as possible

Dr Boyd gave a presentation to Board members on how the AFBI Executive intend to implement the various recommendations contained in the reports. This will involve –

- Engagement with AFBI staff at Grade 6 level who will be instrumental in taking this forward.
- Providing advice to AFBI staff.
- Engaging with AFBI stakeholders.
- Providing regular updates to AFBI Board and DARD via AFBI Sponsor Branch.

The programme management structure will centre around three key strategies –

- Business Strategy
- People Strategy
- Assets Strategy

with each key strategy being sub-divided into various projects managed by staff at Grade 6 level.

At the conclusion, Dr Boyd advised that the purpose of the presentation was to provide the AFBI Board with an insight of what is being proposed and the necessary work to be undertaken.

In the general discussion arising from the presentation the Chair, Mr Hogan stated that it was rare for such a “*young*” organisation to have such a strategic and visionary process at this stage of its development. Mr Hogan also stated this was an exciting piece of work and advised members of the Executive that they had one hundred percent support of the AFBI Board.

Several other Board members also endorsed the comments and support of the Chair and offered further advice such as –

- The importance of “*driving*” the implementation down through the various levels in the organisation.
- Considering the involvement of external help and assistance in managing the implementation programme and maintaining an

overview of the various strategies and how the programme was progressing.

The Deputy Chair, Professor McDowell welcomed this initiative and stated that the objective of the “*first*” AFBI Board was to help and assist change within the organisation having been created from a Civil Service background and he was glad to see that this was happening.

Dr S Kennedy thanked the Board for its support and given the wealth of experience of the Board members, was in no doubt that this support will be called upon at some point.

With regards to a timeframe, Dr Camlin advised that the exercise may last 2-3 years. The aim of the Executive was for all projects to pass the “*start line*” together but due to the nature of the work involved each of the various projects will probably be finalised at different times.

Mr Hogan congratulated Dr Boyd and Dr Kennedy and asked that this vote of thanks be conveyed to other members of SMT.

Action: Dr S Kennedy/Dr Boyd to convey vote of thanks to SMT.

3.4 Public Sector Research Exploitation Fund (PSRE)

Dr Boyd informed the Board that AFBI had been successful in respect of its bid for PSRE funding.

Dr Boyd outlined the background objectives to the AFBI bid and provided an explanation on the breakdown of the figures submitted. An acknowledgement was also given to the support that AFBI had received from other external partners/stakeholders.

It was agreed that Dr Boyd would circulate details of the bid to members of the Board via the restricted Board website.

Action: Dr Boyd to circulate details of the bid to members of the Board via the restricted Board website.

4. Report from Business Support Unit

Mr Dolan presented a report to the Board on behalf of the AFBI Business Support Unit. A copy of the report had been circulated prior to the meeting.

4.1 Risk Management

The current Corporate Risk Register (CRR) is undergoing a review within the organisation and when complete the findings will be reported to SMT in the first instance and then to the AFBI Board.

Mr Dolan informed the Board that he envisages substantial changes to the CRR due to the fact that the current CRR reflects the position of the organisation since its creation on 1 April 2006.

4.2 Fraud

There were no reports of fraud or suspected fraud within the organisation. Fraud Awareness training for senior staff is continuing.

4.3 Health and Safety

There were no reports of any health and safety related incidents.

At present AFBI is undertaking a review of accident reporting procedures and how data is captured. The findings of this review will be reported in the first instance to the AFBI Health and Safety Advisory Group and then to the AFBI Board via SMT.

An AFBI Vehicle Policy is also being drafted and elements of this document will also have a health and safety input.

In respect of “*near misses*”, consideration is also being given on how to take these forward as an “*action point*”. While the AFBI Executive recognise that there is a good culture of reporting “*near misses*” within the organisation there is currently no record of any follow-up action in respect of these incidents.

4.4 AFBI Accounts 2007-08

Work is ongoing to finalise the draft 2007-08 Accounts in order to have them presented to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) by 30 June 2008. A draft set of Accounts detailing the financial information has been prepared and work is now centred on the accompanying narratives. A final draft of the Accounts will also be copied to members of the AFBI Audit Committee.

Taking into consideration the work still to be completed, the Board were advised that AFBI was still on target to meet all of the key dates in the process and have the Accounts signed-off on 12 September 2008.

4.5 EU Recognition

Further discussions have been held with European Union (EU) officials and AFBI is now awaiting formal notice that the bid for EU Recognition has been successful.

The Board were advised that during the period of negotiation, AFBI had responded to calls for EU Framework 7 proposals. As soon as the formal notice has been received from the EU Commission, any projects

that had been submitted via the QUB route will transfer to AFBI along with the QUB staff who have been employed to undertake the work. Mr Dolan also informed the Board that he and several AFBI colleagues had recently attended a European Conference in Budapest, Hungary. The Conference had been very informative and highlighted a need for AFBI to establish a Research Support Office to mirror that already in place within QUB, due to the increased administration involved in the co-ordination of the projects. An internal meeting will be held to discuss this issue.

The Board congratulated Mr Dolan for the work and effort he had undertaken in relation to the issue of EU Recognition and looked forward to receiving notification of a successful outcome.

4.6 Invest NI Innovation Voucher Scheme

Mr Dolan informed the Board that AFBI had already signed up the first company under the terms of this Scheme and another six companies are awaiting a response. It was also noted that AFBI were the first to sign up a company in advance of QUB and UU.

This scheme will also prove to be quite useful in assisting AFBI with the bid for EU Recognition due to the partnership arrangements created with commercial companies particularly in the area of small to medium sized enterprises. The Board were also informed that Invest NI now regard AFBI as a “*knowledge provider*” and this also has potential to unlock further opportunities.

4.7 Finance – 2008-09 Financial Year

Mr Dolan provided members of the Board with an up-to-date report on AFBI's financial position. A copy of the report had been circulated to members prior to the meeting.

Mr Dolan addressed a number of issues raised during the course of discussion particularly in relation to income and the amounts attributable to each of the AFBI Divisions.

4.8 Outturn 2007-08 Business Plan & Commentary

A copy of the report from AFBI Internal Audit was circulated to Board members prior to the meeting.

Mr Dolan informed the Board that in terms of the overall findings of the report, AFBI had failed to achieve its business targets. However, on closer examination of the details contained in the report in the majority of cases the reason for failure was due to the form of words used to accompany the target or the way the target had been defined.

In supporting this view a member of the Board highlighted the fact that if the overall target was sub-divided and an examination of the sub-targets was undertaken it would show clearly that AFBI had more than met its stated targets.

The Board agreed that in respect of this year's Business Plan (2008-09) the AFBI Executive should re-examine the targets and if these are to be measured in "*volume*" and "*turn-around times*" rather than quantity, the AFBI Executive should re-think how these targets have been defined and amend if necessary.

Furthermore the Board agreed that those members of the Board and the Executive attending the Performance Review Meeting with the DARD Minister and Permanent Secretary should present the evidence provided showing success in terms of the sub-targets as this clearly transforms the outcome of the report.

- Action: 1. AFBI Executive to re-examine 2008-09 Business Plan and amend targets if necessary.**
- 2. Members of the Board and Executive to present the DARD Minister and Permanent Secretary with the evidence showing the success in terms of the sub-targets achieved.**

4.9 Draft Business Plan 2008-09

A copy of the draft Business Plan for 2008-09 was circulated to Board members prior to the meeting.

Mr Dolan advised the Board that the re-write in this version of the draft Business Plan for 2008-09 had arose from changes in the draft AFBI Corporate Plan. The version presented concentrates more on AFBI's objectives rather than reference to DARD objectives.

In light of the previous discussion on the Outturns of the 2007-08 AFBI Business Plan it was accepted that "*turn-around*" times were more appropriate and more relevant in terms of identifying customer/stakeholder satisfaction and AFBI's achievements of its aims and objectives.

It was proposed by Dr Hollywood and seconded by Mr Walker that the draft Business Plan for 2008-09 be accepted subject to the AFBI Executive taking note of the comments made and making any necessary amendments to the targets.

- Action: AFBI Executive to note approval of the draft Business Plan for 2008-09 and make any necessary amendments to the targets in line with the comments of the Board.**

5. Crossnacreevy Relocation

Dr Camlin provided the Board with an update on the proposed relocation of the work programme and associated staff from the AFBI Plant Testing Station at Crossnacreevy.

Dr Camlin informed the Board that a Crossnacreevy Relocation Team (CRT) had been established with specific Terms of Reference concentrating solely on the relocation and the completion of an associated Business Case. Dr Camlin stressed the point that the sale and valuation was and is not part of the CRT's remit and the disposal of the land is DARD's responsibility.

In recent days some problems with the valuation of the land had been announced and it was noted that DARD had given an indication that it was currently awaiting an AFBI Business Case and Assets Strategy Document before it could make a decision. Dr Camlin pointed out that this was not the position as there was never an indication given that an Assets Strategy would be available to DARD in September 2008.

The CRT have now identified six potential sites and these will be narrowed down yet further to a possible list of three at a future meeting with the Team being on target to present a Business Case to DARD in September 2008 subject to approval by SMT and the AFBI Board.

In the discussion that followed members of the Board expressed strong concern about the possible damage to AFBI's reputation amongst its stakeholders. Concerns were also expressed that this issue was not good for the business of the organisation given the time and effort in dealing with a situation that was not of AFBI's making.

Mr Hogan also advised that he would wish to raise the issue during the forthcoming Performance Review Meeting in order to highlight the major difficulties that the issue has caused to AFBI staff.

The Board thanked Dr Camlin for his report and acknowledged the work undertaken by Dr Camlin and the CRT.

- Action:**
1. **CRT to complete Business Case and submit to SMT and AFBI Board before submission to DARD.**
 2. **Mr Hogan to raise the issue at the Performance Review Meeting with the DARD Minister and Permanent Secretary.**

6. Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme

6.1 Chronological List of Key Dates Relating to Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme

Prof McDowell referred to the correspondence that had been circulated to Board members prior to the meeting and advised that these were the last remaining items of correspondence from recent meetings of the AFBI Remuneration Committee. Reference was made to the "*Chronological List of Key Dates Relating to Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme*" particularly to the period between 18 April 2007 and 21 November 2007. Prof McDowell advised Board colleagues that during this period documentation had been sent to DARD but no response had been received for over six months.

The Board noted the detail and expressed continued disappointment that despite its efforts to have this matter finalised no further progress appears to have taken place.

Action: Board to continue monitoring the issue and raise the issue with DARD officials at every opportunity.

6.2 Minutes from Remuneration Committee Meeting held on 12 March 2008 and 21 April 2008

The minutes of the Remuneration Committee meetings held on 12 March 2008 and 21 April 2008 were approved by the Board.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Board Meetings

The Board noted the current position of the issues recorded on the Rolling Database.

Action: Secretariat to update and revise Rolling Database.

7.2 Ministerial Visit

Mr Hogan informed the Board that DARD had facilitated the Minister with an office video link at Loughry College and had offered the AFBI Board the opportunity to meet with the Minister at Loughry. However, Mr Hogan informed the Board that he remained keen on securing a Board meeting at Hillsborough on any occasion that would be suitable to the Minister and will attempt to secure a date at the forthcoming Performance Review Meeting.

Action: Chair to seek confirmation of a Ministerial Meeting and advise Board colleagues.

7.3 Accountability Training for Board Members

The Board noted the correspondence received from AFBI Sponsor Branch and agreed that the names of the Board members who have not yet had this training be submitted for consideration.

Action: Secretariat to liaise with AFBI Sponsor Branch and notify Board members of arrangements.

7.4 ARINI Pensions Issue

The Board noted that it had been copied into recent correspondence between the Minister and Mr Jeffrey Donaldson MP MLA regarding an ex-employee of ARINI. The Board reiterated its concern for the individual and its wish to see this matter brought to a speedy conclusion.

7.5 Intellectual Property Rights – Pending Court Case

In response to a query from a member of the Board, the Board were advised that all relevant documents had now been presented to the Court and a final date for a court hearing was now awaited.

8. Date of the Next Meeting

Due to the majority of members having holiday commitments during the month of July it was decided to cancel the July Board meeting. The next meeting of the AFBI Board will be held in August 2008.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____

Matters arising and action points from meeting on 25 June 2008

1.	<i>Item 1</i>	<u>Minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 May 2008</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board Secretariat to note all three points and arrange accordingly. 	SC
2.	<i>Item 2.1</i>	<u>Item 2.6 – Appointment of a Business Manager</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secretariat to check position if Business Manager is to give a presentation to the Board at August meeting and make arrangements if necessary. 	SC
3.	<i>Item 2.2</i>	<u>Item 4.5.3 – Development Strategies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr Boyd to circulate reports to Board members. 	RB
4.	<i>Item 2.3</i>	<u>Item 5 – Report from Audit Committee – 29 April 2008</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secretary to discuss detail of the proposal and arrange in respect of future papers. 	SC
5.	<i>Item 3.1</i>	<u>Draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2008-09 to 2010-11</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr Boyd to note AFBI Board approval and forward the draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2008-09 to 2010-11 to DARD/DFP for formal ratification. 	RB
6.	<i>Item 3.2</i>	<u>Renewables Conference</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AFBI Executive to provide Board members with a brief including a financial breakdown of all of the costs associated with the event by the end of July 2008. 	SMT
7.	<i>Item 3.3</i>	<u>Consultancy Reports</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr S Kennedy/Dr Boyd to convey vote of thanks to SMT. 	SK/RB
8.	<i>Item 3.4</i>	<u>Public Sector Research Exploitation Fund (PSRE)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr Boyd to circulate details of the bid to members of the Board via the restricted Board website. 	RB

9.	<i>Item 4.8</i>	<u>Outturn 2007-08 Business Plan & Commentary</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFBI Executive to re-examine 2008-09 Business Plan and amend targets if necessary. • Members of the Board and Executive to present the DARD Minister and Permanent Secretary with the evidence showing the success in terms of the sub-targets achieved. 	SMT SH/SMT
10.	<i>Item 4.9</i>	<u>Draft Business Plan 2008-09</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFBI Executive to note approval of the draft Business Plan for 2008-09 and make any necessary amendments to the targets in line with the comments of the Board. 	SMT
11.	<i>Item 5</i>	<u>Crossnacreevy Relocation</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRT to complete Business Case and submit to SMT and AFBI Board before submission to DARD. • Mr Hogan to raise the issue at the Performance Review Meeting with the DARD Minister and Permanent Secretary. 	CRT SH
12.	<i>Item 6.1</i>	<u>Chronological List of Key Dates Relating to Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board to continue monitoring progress and highlight the issue at every opportunity. 	BOARD
13.	<i>Item 7.1</i>	<u>Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Board Meetings</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat to update and revise Rolling Database. 	SC
14.	<i>Item 7.2</i>	<u>Ministerial Visit</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair to seek confirmation of a Ministerial Meeting and advise Board colleagues. 	SH
15.	<i>Item 7.3</i>	<u>Accountability Training for Board Members</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat to liaise with AFBI Sponsor Branch and notify Board members of arrangements. 	SC