



**Minutes of the Meeting of the Agri-Food and Bio-Sciences Institute (AFBI) Board  
held at  
AFBI Newforge (Headquarters), Belfast  
on Wednesday 25 March 2009 at 10.00am**

**Present - Board Members**

Mr Sean Hogan, Chairperson  
Mr Kieran Campbell  
Dr Michael Hollywood  
Dr Christine Kennedy  
Mr Nicholas Mack  
Mr John McKinley  
Prof Stewart McNulty  
Prof Grace Mulcahy  
Mr James Noble  
Mr John Rankin

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

Dr George McIlroy, CEO  
Dr Robin Boyd, DCEO (Acting)  
Dr Seamus Kennedy, DCEO  
Dr Michael Camlin, DCEO  
Mr Joel Ferguson, AFBI Business Manager  
Mr Stephen Cousins, AFBI Secretariat

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

**ACTION**

The Chair opened the meeting with a word of welcome for all present.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following Board members –

Prof David McDowell  
Mr Michael Walker

**3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 25 February 2009**

It was proposed by Prof Stewart McNulty and seconded by Dr Christine Kennedy that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 February 2009 be accepted subject to the following amendment -

Item 4.6 - Item 10.2 – AFBI Audit Committee – Payments to Board Members Who Serve on Board Sub-committees

First paragraph should be replaced with –

*“The Secretary reported that this was still work in progress. AFBI Sponsor Branch have yet to clarify the position relating to the current ceiling approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel to cover the remuneration of Board members who serve on AFBI Sub-Committees (Remuneration Committee/Audit Committee).*

#### **4. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting – 25 February 2009**

##### **4.1 Item 4.2 – Item 4.4 - Publication Scheme**

Dr Boyd reminded the Board that the Publication Scheme became a statutory requirement for all public bodies from 1 January 2009. Most of the information that needs to be published in order to meet the requirements of the Scheme is in place.

Following discussion the Board indicated that they were content that 95% of the information required was accessible via the AFBI website and were content that Board members expenses could also be published.

Overall the Board agreed that AFBI should comply with the requirements of the Publication Scheme by providing as much information and detail as possible.

##### **4.2 Item 4.3 – Item 5.3 Health and Safety**

See Item 6.3.

##### **4.3 Item 4.5 – Item 10.2 - AFBI Audit Committee/Renewal of Membership**

The Board considered this matter in the context of new appointments being made to the AFBI Board and the likelihood that any new appointees would have financial experience and would be of benefit to the Audit Committee. The Board therefore decided that it would be best to appoint one person from the current AFBI Board to shadow the Audit Committee in the interim and retain a vacancy until new appointments have been confirmed later in the year.

The Chair agreed that he would discuss this matter with a number of Board members and keep the Board informed of developments.

**Chair**

In the general discussion that followed the Board agreed with the Chair's suggestion that any new appointments to the Board should include someone with commercial experience in the agri-food sector along with someone who had financial expertise. The Chair also confirmed that he would wish to recruit five new members to fill the positions being vacated as well as an additional member to fill the existing vacancy. This would bring the Board back to its full compliment of thirteen (including the Chair).

**4.4** Item 4.6 – Item 10.2 - AFBI Audit Committee – Payment to Board Members who Serve on Board Sub-committees

Secretary reported that ASB had advised him that the Department of Finance and Personnel appear not to be aware of the current total ceiling limit of £5k covering the daily rate for AFBI Board members who serve on AFBI sub-committees. ASB are pursuing the matter on behalf of AFBI and the Secretary will hopefully have an update in time for the April Board meeting.

The Secretary also advised that during the course of this issue it had transpired that the Board remuneration increase for 2007/08 had not yet been paid.

ASB have since confirmed that the individual appraisals for Board members for the 2007/08 period were completed satisfactorily and arrangements have now been made for the remuneration increase to be paid along with any backdated amounts that are owed.

**4.5** Item 9.1 - Rolling Database

See Item 14.4.

**4.6** Item 9.3 - Draft AFBI Business Plan 2009/10

Dr Boyd advised that the drafting of the Business Plan 2009/10 was well advanced and he was interacting with ASB to get an agreed draft before issuing to the Board for comment and approval.

In order to expedite matters it was agreed that Dr Boyd would arrange for the final draft to be cleared via correspondence. This would enable the draft to be presented to the DARD Departmental Management Board which is due to meet before the next AFBI Board meeting.

**RB**

**5. Review of Open Meeting**

The Board reflected on the Open Meeting and the following comments were noted –

- Feedback from the event had been very positive and the Chair believed that the event had gone well.
- The Board were much more pleased with the event this year than last and felt that this was due to more visitors and a better representation from the agri-food industry including members of the press and stakeholders.
- There may be a need to consider the format for future years and consider the number of presentations that are given.

- There may also be a need to reconsider the topics for presentation with much emphasis on the science and business of the organisation rather than the Accounts and Annual Report which may be accommodated in some other way.
- The Executive may wish to consider and reflect on the need for someone with a more specialist accounting knowledge to be in attendance when the Accounts are presented in order that they could provide more detailed response to any technical questions.

In response to the final point it was noted that Mr Deshpande, AFBI Accountant, was present at the meeting and had answered some points of detail.

In drawing the discussion to a close the Chair stated that he was not aware of any ongoing issues or any adverse comments and there were a number of people present whom he would like to invite to AFBI on a more informal basis.

The Board were fully supportive of these ideas and encouraged the Chair to go forward on this basis.

## **6. Report from CEO's Office and Business Support Unit**

### **6.1 AFBI Risk Management**

Dr Boyd reflected on the updated AFBI Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and highlighted a number of changes that had been made since the CRR was last presented to the Board. Dr Boyd advised that these changes had been made as a result of a review carried out by the AFBI Risk Management Co-ordination Group at its meeting on 4 November 2008.

The updated CRR had been presented to the AFBI Audit Committee at its meeting on 3 February 2009 and was now being presented to the Board for noting.

On a query from the Board, Dr Boyd confirmed that the Risks currently listed under the name of Dr S Neill were being managed by Dr A Gilmour.

### **6.2 Fraud and Whistleblowing**

There were no reports of fraud or whistleblowing within the organisation.

With regard to the theft of cattle from AFBI Loughgall, the Board were informed that there had been no further developments in terms of having them recovered or returned and there had been no response to the reward that had been offered.

The Executive acknowledged that the loss of the cattle would undoubtedly have an adverse impact on the research programme and some aspects of this may have to start from the beginning.

The Executive advised that the response from stakeholders was very supportive and the impression from the stakeholders appeared to indicate that they regarded this more of a crime against the industry rather than against AFBI.

The Board were also advised that no decision had been taken yet as to whether or not valuable cattle or livestock would be located at Loughgall in the future. However, a number of high level security options were currently being implemented.

### **6.3 Health and Safety**

#### **6.3.1 Health and Safety Reports**

There were no reports of any Health and Safety related incidents within the organisation.

#### **6.3.2 Changes to Health and Safety Legislation**

Dr Boyd referred to a paper that he had circulated to the Board prior to the meeting, detailing recent changes to the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 that came into force on 16 January 2009. The paper outlined the main changes to the legislation and the Board were asked to take note particularly with regard to the impact on AFBI which was highlighted in the conclusion.

#### **6.3.3 Communication Between AFBI and DARD**

As a follow up to a previous undertaking given at the January Board meeting, Dr Boyd provided the Board with an overview of the communication system that exists between AFBI (as tenant) and DARD (as landlord) to ensure that minor capital and building works are registered for appropriate action.

Dr Boyd reported that the proposed work required is identified and discussed within the respective Divisions before it is submitted to the Health and Safety Officers for them to examine and allocate a health and safety rating, if applicable, with a No 1 signifying the highest priority. The list is then returned to the Divisions to be prioritised before it is forwarded to AFBI Estates and then to DARD. DARD then action the work on the basis of the finance available with those items that have been allocated the highest health and safety rating being given priority. However, given the fact that the finances are limited it was accepted that not all of the work listed will be completed. This process is undertaken on an annual basis and initiated at the start of each financial year.

#### **6.3.4** Meeting with Chair of Health and Safety Executive

Dr Boyd informed the Board that members of the AFBI Executive had met recently with the Chair of the Health and Safety Executive, Northern Ireland to discuss best practice within organisations such as AFBI. This meeting also coincides with the Executive's objective of procuring an external consultant to undertake a review of AFBI's current Health and Safety structures

The Executive assured the Board that Health and Safety remained paramount within the organisation and gave an undertaking to continue to bring reviews and assurance to the Board. The Executive also welcomed the opportunity for the Board to challenge the Executive on Health and Safety matters.

#### **6.4** Finance

The Executive advised the Board that the current budget for the 2008/09 financial year was still on target and advised that some income would be received after 31 March 2009 but would accrue to the 2008/09 Accounts.

The Executive also confirmed that part of the expenditure shown under PSRE4 funding related to the International Renewable Energy Conference held in October 2008.

### **7. Account NI**

The Executive provided the Board with some background information and details relating to the current position. The Executive advised that although a lot of the functionality issues had been resolved, concerns still existed particularly in two key areas relating to cost and the length of the contract.

The Executive acknowledged that if AFBI did not go live with Account NI it would leave it in a dilemma however, the proposed plan of action would be -

- AFBI would utilise Account NI on a provisional basis for a one year period;
- that DARD would assist with any charges incurred during the first year;
- that during this initial one year period Account NI would address any outstanding issues;
- during the course of the year AFBI would assess other financial accounting systems.

The CEO reflected on the correspondence that had been exchanged to date between the various parties i.e. AFBI, DARD and Account NI and stated that he valued the support of the Board and the Chair in this matter.

Reference was also made to the most recent letter from the DARD Finance Director, Mr John Smyth and the CEO stated that the comments made in this letter were significant in terms of supporting AFBI's position regarding the lack of costs.

It was noted that the Board appreciated the efforts of the Executive Team in its attempts to resolve the outstanding issues and were assured that the change to the accounting system was being managed by a project manager and a strong project team.

The Executive agreed to keep the Board updated on progress and agreed that the issue should remain on the agenda for future Board meetings.

**Exec/Sec**

## **8. AFBI Policies**

A number of draft AFBI Policies were presented to the Board for noting and approval. The Board advised that they were content for all AFBI Policies to be presented to them by the Executive for their information or approval.

### **8.1 ICT Strategy**

The Board were advised that AFBI is now operating on an accredited IT network supported by IT Assist.

The Board were assured that AFBI was making full use of the services being provided by IT Assist and all responsibility for the provision of IT services had transferred to them.

The Board were also advised that the feedback from IT Assist would indicate that AFBI is an intelligent customer and as such was probably getting a better service at present than some of the other Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments.

The Board noted and approved the ICT Strategy.

### **8.2 AFBI Visiting Workers Policy**

On a proposal from Mr John Rankin seconded by Mr John McKinley the Board noted and approved the Visiting Workers Policy.

### **8.3 AFBI Internet and Email Usage Policy**

The Board were advised that this policy mirrors the current DARD policy.

On a proposal from Mr Kieran Campbell seconded by Prof Stewart McNulty the Board noted and approved the Internet and E-mail Usage Policy.

#### **8.4** AFBI Intellectual Property Rights

The Board were advised that this was an update on current policy and was more of a guide to staff now that AFBI Innovations is in place. It is seen very much as a working document and as such is open to continuing progress.

The Board very much welcomed the IP Policy and in the general discussion that followed the Board reflected on some of the comments made by Dr Frank O'Mara, Teagasc Research Director concerning IP that he had made during the recent George Scott Robertson Memorial Lecture held at AFBI Newforge.

On the subject of the George Scott Robertson Lecture, the Board acknowledged the role of Dr M Camlin in organising the event and on being awarded the prestigious Belfast Telegraph Cup.

The Board confirmed that they were very supportive of the Policy and were content that it covered all of the relevant issues but recommended that the Executive examine the issue of Patent Protection Insurance if this had not yet been considered.

The Policy was approved by the Board on a proposal by Dr Michael Hollywood seconded by Prof Stewart McNulty.

#### **9. Report from Audit Committee**

The Chair of the AFBI Audit Committee, Dr Hollywood presented a report on the 11<sup>th</sup> Audit Committee meeting held on 3 February 2009 along with a copy of the draft minutes of the meeting which he asked the Board to note.

During the course of the discussion that followed Dr Hollywood made specific reference to the AFBI Corporate Risk Register and in particular, to "*Risk No5 – Failure to Respond Effectively to an Emergency*". On the foot of a presentation given by Dr Kennedy, the Audit Committee were content to inform the Board that they had received adequate assurance from AFBI management that this risk is being managed appropriately.

Dr Hollywood also advised that he had acted on one of the recommendations that had arisen from the Board Effectiveness Review, namely that there should be more interaction with the DARD Audit Committee. Following a conversation with Mrs Gaw (AFBI Sponsor Branch) at last month's Open Meeting a meeting has now been arranged with the Chair of the DARD Corporate Governance and Audit Committee, Mr Donal Flanagan.

In commenting on the report and the news that a meeting had been arranged with Mr Flanagan, the Chair stated that the Board took great comfort and assurance from the work carried out by the Audit Committee and thanked the members accordingly.

The Chair asked Dr Hollywood to provide him with an informal report following the meeting with Mr Flanagan.

**MH**

#### **10. AFBI Board Effectiveness Review**

The Chair reported that there had been a follow-up meeting with Mr Simon Parker following the Board Effectiveness Review workshop held in January 2009. Mr Parker is due to hold a further meeting with the CEO and the AFBI Senior Management Team with the aim of familiarising himself with the work of SMT and how the strategic planning process links with the Board at present.

The Chair advised that his aim would be to present a paper to the Board at the April meeting for discussion and comment.

**Chair**

The Board indicated that they were content with the progress being made.

#### **11. Pensions Issue**

This issue is still on track to be completed within the agreed timeframe and a draft Business Case in respect for the Bulk Transfer is now with DARD for consideration and comment.

The Board were also advised that work was ongoing in relation to the Superannuation Compensatory Allowance and the need to repay staff affected by its removal. This issue affects only non-industrial staff of which there are twenty two. As part of the process each of these individuals will have to be reissued with revised Options Packs.

Once the final decisions have been made and returned the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) will have two weeks to determine the exact amount required to be transferred and on the day the final calculations are made DARD will then have to commit to this figure or face the prospect of the process having to be repeated.

#### **12. Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme**

The Board noted that the pending court case relating to a claim from a member of AFBI staff for a right to a share of royalties had now been postponed until September 2009. Hopefully, this will allow more time for AFBI to have a Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme approved and progress is being made in respect of DARD's request for a supporting Business Case.

### **13. Request for a SAPO4 Facility**

The Board were advised that DARD Animal Health and Welfare Branch had established a working group to examine this issue in more detail. The Executive informed the Board that they regarded this as a positive step and welcomed the establishment of the group.

The Executive advised that they have been made aware of a number of questions that are likely to be raised by the group but these are not new issues and are confident that they can provide answers to whatever queries are raised.

The Board acknowledged the work of the Executive in taking this issue forward and will await further updates.

### **14. Any Other Business**

#### **14.1 Update on Emergency Response to the Dioxins in Contaminated Feed**

The Executive provided the Board with an update on the current emergency response.

The Board were informed that the Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly had offered hardship payments subject to the affected herd owners agreeing to a voluntary cull of their animals. This had been agreed and the cull had now commenced.

The focus of attention had now switched to the disposal of the slurry and the establishment of a Scientific Working Group Chaired by the CEO. However, while this Group was tasked with providing the scientific evidence to the various departments it was clear that its role was not to take decisions.

The Group has now been tasked with specifically examining the option of disposing the slurry on forestry land and further meetings will take place shortly.

The CEO advised the Board that there will undoubtedly be a review following the conclusion of this event but he was confident that AFBI will be able to provide the necessary assurances and proof that it had acted in a totally professional manner and AFBI's performance in this matter would stand up to scrutiny.

In response the Board commented on the apparent ineffective and lack of joined up approach of the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Board also noted the supportive comments made by the DARD Permanent Secretary during the recent George Scott Robertson Memorial Lecture when he gave credit to AFBI and the valuable role it had performed in this current emergency.

The Executive also advised that the emergency would also provide the basis for some good scientific papers and these would be circulated within the scientific community in due course.

**14.2** Crossnacreevy Relocation

The Executive confirmed that the Business Case compiled by the Crossnacreevy Relocation Team had been finalised and submitted to DARD for consideration. However, it was noted that it will be DARD's responsibility to provide a separate Business Case to the Department of Finance and Personnel outlining the reasons why the original figure for the sale and development of the site had not been realised.

**14.3** REAP

The Board noted the DARD Minister's decision to stand down the Research and Education Advisory Panel.

**14.4** Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Board Meetings

Secretary confirmed and the Board acknowledged that the Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Board Meetings had been updated and revised.

**15. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Board will be held on Wednesday 22 April 2009 at AFBI Crossnacreevy.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_