



**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at AFBI (HQ) Newforge
on Tuesday 18 December 2012 at 10.00am**

Present – Board Members

Mr Sean Hogan
Prof William McKelvey
Mr Seamus McCaffrey
Mrs Hilda Stewart
Mr Trevor Hinds
Prof Patrick Murphy
Mr David Lindsay
Mrs Hilary McCartan
Dr Cecil McMurray
Mr Alan McKeown
Mr Ken Millar

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Prof Seamus Kennedy, CEO
Dr Michael Camlin, DCEO - APSBD
Dr Walter Crozier, DCEO - AFESD (Acting)
Dr Glenn Kennedy DCEO – VSD (Acting)
Mr Darren Griffiths, Interim Director of Finance
Mr Paul Brennan, Head of AFBI HR

Dr Matthew Service, Fisheries and Aquatics Ecosystems Branch
Dr James Strong, Fisheries and Aquatics Ecosystems Branch
Mrs Carol Moore, DARD

Mr Stephen Cousins, AFBI Secretariat

1. Welcome and Introduction

ACTION

The Chair welcomed all present to the final meeting of 2012.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of AFBI Board members Mrs Sarah Havlin and Mr Bob McCann. An apology was also submitted by the Executive on behalf of Mr Joel Ferguson, Head of Corporate Services Division (Acting) and the Board expressed its condolences on the recent passing of Joel's father.

3. Conflict of Interests Declaration

The items on the agenda gave no reason for any member to declare a conflict of interest and there were no changes in respect of Board Members' Register of Interests.

4. Presentation on Seabed Mapping

Dr Matt Service and Dr James Strong gave the Board a presentation on seabed mapping. Board members were given an insight into the working and benefits of the service, its impact on fisheries and environmental policies and its commercial value to AFBI.

During the course of the presentation two Board members - Prof McKelvey

and Mr Lindsay -declared potential conflicts of interest which the Board duly noted but agreed that they were not actual conflicts of interest. **ACTION**

At the conclusion of the presentation the Board acknowledged the unique contribution that such a resource makes to AFBI and thanked Dr Service and Dr Strong for an excellent and informative presentation.

(Dr Service and Dr Strong left the meeting)

5. Draft Minutes of the Previous AFBI Board Meeting held on 23 October 2012

On a proposal from Dr McMurray, seconded by Mr Trevor Hinds, the Board approved the draft minutes of the previous Board meeting without amendment.

6. Matters Arising/Action Points from Previous AFBI Board Meeting held on 23 October 2012

6.1 Post Grading Evaluations – Item 6.6

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has extended two “Job Evaluation Grading System” licences to AFBI in order that it may carry out its own post grading evaluations. To date AFBI HR Unit has conducted two post grading exercises under DARD supervision but will be moving towards fully independent post grading in the near future.

(Mr McKeown entered the meeting)

7. Chair’s Business

The Chair informed members that the Information Commissioner has declared that AFBI Board members’ appraisals are exempt from public disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Chair advised that he has asked AFBI Internal Audit to review the current board members’ appraisal process and acknowledged that any changes to the current process would require DARD approval.

The Chair informed board members that he would e-mail them a report on the recent meeting that he and the Deputy Chair had with the DARD Minister, Michelle O’Neill MLA, and senior DARD officials.

Chair

8. CEO’s Report

The CEO presented his report to the AFBI Board and highlighted a number of key items.

8.1 Equal Pay Issue

ACTION

AFBI has responded to several queries from DARD on the revised business case which seeks DARD and DFP approval for application of the equivalent of the NICS equal pay deal to qualifying AFBI staff (to be funded from AFBI's own resources). DARD was content with the revisions and submitted the business case to DFP on 12 October 2012.

8.2 Update on the Implementation of Recommendations arising from the Organisational Review of AFBI

Interviews for the appointments to the two science director and Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs posts have been completed with anticipated start dates in early 2013.

A "SIFT" meeting for the recruitment of a G6 Head of Finance (two-year fixed-term post with possibility of permanency) was held on 30 November 2012 and interviews are scheduled to take place during the week commencing Monday 7 January 2013.

A first meeting of the AFBI/DARD/Strategic Investment Board Group is being arranged for early 2013.

8.3 AFBI Estate

A meeting of the DARD/AFBI Estate Programme Board was held on 14 December 2012. The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is content with DARD's proposal to investigate the options for the future of the AFBI estate in a holistic manner, and a revised Strategic Outline Business Case will be prepared and submitted to DFP in due course. In the meantime, DFP's Central Procurement Directorate is nearing completion of a feasibility study for the future of the Main Building at Veterinary Sciences Division, Stoney Road. It is anticipated that work on the outline business case for this project will be resumed shortly, now that it has been accepted by DARD that no functions from Newforge Lane should be relocated to AFBI Stormont as part of the redevelopment of that site.

The CEO also met with the Chair and CEO of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation during which he registered a strong interest, in principle, of AFBI becoming involved in further discussions on the development plans for that site.

8.4 Badger Sett Survey

The CEO outlined preparations for DARD's proposed survey of badger setts. The Board expressed concern that AFBI has not yet received sufficient details of the study design from DARD in order to complete the preparations and noted the potential risk to AFBI's reputation due to the absence of the required information.

8.5 Strategic Cost Model

ACTION

DARD has indicated its agreement in principle to AFBI's approach to developing the Strategic Cost Model.

8.6 Northern Ireland Audit Office Value for Money (VfM) Review

The Board noted that a second draft of the NIAO report has been received and that AFBI and DARD are in the process of preparing a response. Commenting on the review, the Board expressed the opinion that AFBI should address any issues that are identified in the report as requiring remedial action but should defend against any potential unfair criticism.

8.7 Other Notable Events

The CEO also provided the Board with a summary of points made by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland at a recent seminar that he had attended. These included the need to ensure that an accurate and detailed record is kept of all business decisions made in public sector organisations and that there was trend emerging from the Westminster Public Accounts Committee (PAC) for the staff responsible for major decisions (including retirees) to accompany the Accounting Officer to PAC hearings.

9. **Reports from Divisions**

9.1 Report from Applied Plant Science and Biometrics Division (APSBD)

Reference was made to the recent outbreak of ash dieback disease. DARD are content with the current throughput of samples being tested by AFBI but have expressed concern at AFBI's scientific capacity when the number of samples to be tested increases in the New Year. The Executive advised that it is content with AFBI's capacity to test the foreseeable number of submissions and has a team of trained scientists in place.

A review of the longer term skills base and capacity within plant sciences has recently been carried out and will be considered by SMT as part of its succession planning.

In further discussion, the CEO made reference to DARD's recently completed review of its emergency response requirements. AFBI had been requested to identify its capacity to respond to emergencies and indicate the associated costs, across a wide range of scientific areas. However, DARD had not supplied any indication of the scale of incident that it required AFBI to respond to.

In response the Board stated that it would be useful to have a paper from the Executive detailing AFBI's resources against DARD's requirements for maintaining an emergency response capability. It was also noted that AFBI's Science Strategy Committee may also wish to consider this issue.

Exec

9.2 Report from Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science Division (AFESD) **ACTION**

The report from AFESD highlighted the R&D activity on a branch by branch basis as well as a number of recent visits to AFBI including one from the Bakeries Sub-Group of the Agri-Food Strategy Board.

Particular reference was made to the December 2012 meeting of the EU Council of Fisheries Ministers at which the DARD Minister had obtained a favourable outcome for Northern Ireland. The Board recognised the value of the scientific support provided to the Minister and DARD which had underpinned the successful negotiating position.

It was also noted that DEFRA have agreed funding for AFBI to lead a consortium of UK institutes to develop a “*plankton indicator*” for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. It was agreed that leading this project was important recognition of the high quality of AFBI’s marine science.

9.3 Report from Veterinary Sciences Division (VSD)

The Board noted the report from VSD and particular comment was made on the forthcoming change in the BSE testing regime. The Executive advised that staff at VSD are currently examining the implications of this change but the immediate practical impact will probably be an approximate 70% decrease in the volume of BSE testing.

9.4 Report from Corporate Services Division (CSD)

The Board noted that the report from CSD contained details of the business development targets set for AFBI’s Business Development Executive in the United States of America.

10. Outcomes from AFBI Board Strategy Session – Thurs 6 December 2012

Mrs Moore informed the Board that she was currently working up the outputs from the Strategy Session held on 6 December 2012 and should be in a position to circulate these shortly. Mrs Moore also advised that she will discuss with the Chair how best to take forward the next strategy session to be held on 29 January 2013.

The Board agreed that part of the follow-up to the recent Strategy Day should be a focus on AFBI’s business targets and confirmation of which targets the Board should be monitoring. It was also agreed that the agenda for monthly Board meetings should be reviewed to ensure that sufficient time is available for discussion of important strategic issues.

11. Stress In the Workplace

11.1 Draft Stress in the Workplace Policy

In presenting the draft AFBI Stress in the Workplace Policy, the Executive

informed the Board that the draft policy had been shared with the Health and Safety Executive (NI) who had endorsed it. The policy has also been subjected to equality screening by AFBI's Equality Unit and has been registered on AFBI's policy database.

ACTION

On a proposal from Mr Trevor Hinds, seconded by Mr Ken Millar, the Board approved the draft AFBI Stress in the Workplace Policy.

11.2 Health and Safety Executive (Northern Ireland) Report on the Findings from the Stress in the Workplace Risk Assessment

Focusing on the findings of the report, the Board suggested that the Executive compile an executive summary outlining the key issues and provide an implementation/action plan detailing when and how the key issues will be addressed.

Exec

In the discussion that followed the Board suggested that communication with staff will be very important when it comes to releasing the key findings. The CEO informed the Board that he would be issuing a Christmas message and would also couple this with a note to staff on the findings from the report.

12. Draft HR Strategy

On a proposal from Mr Trevor Hinds, seconded by Mr Seamus McCaffrey, the Board approved the draft HR Strategy.

The Board also accepted a suggestion that this policy should have a link to the AFBI Science Strategy when it has been developed.

Sec

13. Finance

13.1 AFBI Budget Monitor Report

In presenting the AFBI Budget Monitor Report for the period ending 30 November 2012, it was noted that it was only two weeks since the previous report to the AFBI Board had been made and there has been relatively little change in the divisional estimates in the intervening period.

The Executive advised that the overall forecast for the 2012-13 outturn for AFBI is a surplus of £799k. However, AFBI is still awaiting receipt from Land and Property Services of the revised revaluation of the AFBI Hillsborough site and the associated and the quantum of any arrears since completion of the last building work at the site. Land and Property Services have indicated that this information should become known in January 2013. The Executive confirmed that any payments owing in respect of the rateable revaluation will be paid for from this current financial year. It was agreed that an easement should not be declared to DARD until the figure became known. DARD was aware of, and supportive of this position.

AFBI Finance Branch will be working with the appointed experts to explore

the issues relating to the application of Corporation Tax legislation to AFBI and will keep the Board updated on developments. **ACTION**

The Board was content to note the report and made reference to the improvement in the AFBI debtors list.

13.2 Finance Improvement Plan

The Executive presented an update on progress made in implementing the Finance Improvement Plan and highlighted a number of key developments.

- The board were informed that a project plan to reconfigure the current financial management system to enable more flexible financial reporting, especially at project level, has been put in place.
- The Finance Management Team have agreed key performance indicators for 2013-14 and these will be presented to the Corporate Services Management Team and SMT prior to being presented to the AFBI Board.
- Training in the completion of business cases has been completed with three sessions having been delivered to approximately forty staff members with a further twenty due to receive training.
- The timetable for the nine-month closure of accounts has been produced and shared with divisions. AFBI finance staff have already commenced preparatory work which will take place alongside the reconfiguration of the financial management system.

The Board were pleased to note the progress being made.

13.3 Draft (Interim) Financial Scheme of Delegation

The Executive presented a draft Interim Scheme of Financial Delegation and advised that a full Scheme of Financial Delegation covering officers' roles and responsibilities will be developed in time for the start of the next financial year. The Executive also confirmed that the approval limits contained in this draft link to the Sponsorship Manual.

Following consideration the Board accepted the draft Interim Financial Scheme of Delegation.

14. Governance Issues

14.1 AFBI Risk Management

There were no reports of any new or emerging risks to the organisation.

14.1.2 Focus on Corporate Risk No2

ACTION

The CEO provided an overview of Corporate Risk No2 – *If AFBI fails to manage serious and exceptional incidents this will negatively impact AFBI's reputation, service delivery and ability to generate future business and income.*

In response to a query from the Board, the Executive confirmed that AFBI has emergency response plans that tie into other public sector organisations and also advised that AFBI takes into account the risk to the organisation that is posed by suppliers.

14.2 Whistle blowing and Fraud

There was a report of recent night-time suspicious vehicle activity at AFBI Loughgall. Although there was no apparent damage or theft, the Police Service of Northern Ireland) were notified.

14.3 Health and Safety

There were no reports of any major accidents or near misses.

15. **DARD's Arm's Length Bodies (ALB) Sponsorship Manual**

A copy of DARD's ALB Sponsorship Manual was circulated to members of the Board.

In its presentation the Executive outlined the purpose of the manual and informed the Board that many of the recommendations in the manual had already been implemented during 2012/13. A draft list of actions to ensure full implementation of the manual has been agreed with DARD and will be prioritised during January 2013. AFBI will work with DARD to agree a prioritised action plan so that all key governance and oversight arrangements are in place for the start of the 2013/14 financial year.

The Executive agreed that it would bring the prioritised action plan to the Board following agreement with DARD. In the meantime, Board members were asked to consider the contents of the manual and provide comment.

Board

16. **AFBI Appointments and Remuneration Committee – Draft Minutes from Meeting Held on 26 November 2012**

A copy of the draft minutes from the meeting held on 26 November 2012 was presented. Board members were content to note.

17. **Any Other Business**

17.1 Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Previous AFBI Board Meetings

The Board was content to note the changes made to the rolling database of

issues following discussion at its November 2012 meeting.

ACTION

17.2 Correspondence from DARD Minister

The Executive advised the Board that the Minister had sent a letter of thanks to staff following the recent visit to China.

17.3 Congratulations

The Board congratulated Dr Glenn Kennedy and Dr Margaret Patterson on their award of Honorary Professorships by Queen's University Belfast.

18. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the AFBI Board will be held in the AFBI Boardroom, AFBI (HQ), Newforge on Tuesday 29 January 2013.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____