



**Minutes of the Meeting of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute  
(AFBI) Board held at AFBI HQ Newforge  
on Tuesday 24 January 2012 at 10.00am**

**Present – Board Members**

Mr Sean Hogan, Chair  
Prof David McDowell, D/Chair  
Mr Trevor Hinds  
Mr Seamus McCaffrey  
Mr Bob McCann  
Mrs Hilary McCartan  
Prof Stewart McNulty  
Mr John Rankin  
Mr Michael Walker  
Mr James Noble  
Prof Grace Mulcahy

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

Prof Seamus Kennedy, CEO  
Dr Michael Camlin, DCEO  
Dr David Bryson, DCEO (Acting)  
Dr Walter Crozier, DCEO (Acting)  
Mr Joel Ferguson, Head of Corporate Services Division (Acting)  
Mrs Venkat Deshpande, Head of AFBI Finance  
Mr Paul Brennan, Head of AFBI HR  
  
Mr Stephen Cousins, AFBI Secretariat

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

**Action**

The Chair welcomed all those present to the first AFBI Board meeting of 2012.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Mrs Hilda Stewart and Mr Alan McKeown.

**3. Conflict of Interests Declaration**

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

**4. Draft Minutes of the Previous Board Meeting held on 23 November 2011**

On a proposal from Mr Seamus McCaffrey; seconded by Mr Trevor Hinds, the Board approved the draft minutes from the previous Board meeting held on 21 December 2011 without amendment.

**5. Matters Arising/Action Points from Previous AFBI Board Meeting held on 21 December 2011**

**5.1 Item 5 – Review of AFBI’s Commercial Terms and Conditions - Development of an AFBI Non-solicitation and protection of AFBI Intellectual Property Policy**

The Executive informed the Board that the creation of an AFBI policy in support of “*non-solicitation*” and protection of AFBI Intellectual Property was still a matter of work in progress and it was likely to be the end of March before a paper will be available for presentation to the AFBI Board.

Exec

**5.2 Item 5.4 – Joint DARD / AFBI Board Meeting - Minutes**

The Executive confirmed that it had made comments on the draft minutes from the joint DARD / AFBI Board meeting but had not as yet received a final copy from DARD for circulation. The CEO agreed to contact DARD.

CEO

**5.3 Item 5.5 – Business Development - AFBI Representation in the USA**

There have been no further developments since the date of the previous AFBI Board meeting. The Executive is currently waiting on an update from the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington USA.

Exec

**5.4 Item 5.6 – EU Audit of Brucellosis Testing**

There have been no further developments since the date of the previous AFBI Board meeting and the matter currently resides with the EU Auditors.

Exec

**5.5 Item 5.7 – Report on the Contingency Laboratory at VSD**

The Executive informed the Board that a visual non-intrusive inspection had been carried out on the laboratory on 11 January 2012 and the report from the inspection team would indicate that the ceilings in the building are structurally sound and able to withstand normal operational levels of negative pressure.

On the basis of the report the staff who will be working in the building as well as the AFBI Health and Safety Officer, have received the necessary level of assurance required for them to carry out their duties. Work is now ongoing in relation to some minor issues before the building becomes operational.

The Executive thanked the Board for the interest that it had taken in this matter, the support that it had provided to the Executive and also complimented Dr E Stewart, Head of Emergency Planning, Safety and Estate Branch for the work that she had carried out in relation to this matter.

**5.6** Item 5.9 – AFBI Overheads

The Executive informed the Board that the AFBI Senior Management Team had held a Finance Strategy Away Day at AFBI Hillsborough during which the topic of AFBI overhead rates was considered.

The Executive assured the Board that a review of overheads was a priority and the Executive are aiming to have a paper prepared and submitted to the AFBI Board by the end of March 2012.

**Exec****5.7** Item 5.10 – Report from AFBI Board Strategy Committee meeting with DARD held on 26 October 2011 – draft minutes

The Secretary confirmed that DARD had considered the draft minutes from the meeting held on 26 October 2011 and have suggested a number of minor changes.

The Chair of the AFBI Board Strategy Committee informed the Board that the suggested changes will be subject to further consideration at the next meeting of the AFBI Board Strategy Committee that will be held following the conclusion of today's Board meeting.

**SC  
Chair****5.8** Item 5.11 – AFBI Communications Strategy

The Executive reported that the draft AFBI Communications Strategy was currently with the AFBI Senior Management Team for consideration and comment and will be tabled for approval at the next AFBI Board meeting in February 2012.

**Exec****5.9** Item 8.3 – Health and Safety - Incident at AFBI Newforge

The Executive advised the Board that this incident was being dealt with in accordance with AFBI's accident reporting procedures and there was nothing further to report at this time.

**5.10** Item 13 – Proposed Scheme of Delegation and Standing Orders for AFBI Board

The Executive acknowledged that it had received comments from some AFBI Board members and these comments, along with those from the AFBI Senior Management Team, will form the basis for updating both papers which will then be presented for formal approval at the next AFBI Board meeting in February 2012.

**Exec****5.11** Item 16 – Dates for AFBI Board Meetings 2012

The Board expressed a willingness to hold future AFBI Board meetings at venues outside AFBI and asked the Executive to keep this in mind when making arrangements for next year's calendar of meetings.

**Exec**

**6. Chair's Business**

The Chair provided the Board with an update on the current AFBI Board recruitment exercise.

The Chair informed the Board that there had been a very strong field of candidates and a submission was now with the DARD Minister, Michelle O'Neill MLA for consideration and approval.

The Chair is hopeful that the appointments will be made known before the end of the month (January 2012) and if this is the case he will notify Board members accordingly.

**AFBI  
Chair****7. CEO's Report**

The CEO presented his report to the Board for January 2012 and elaborated on a number of issues for the benefit of the Board.

**7.1 Death of Staff Member**

The CEO stated that it was with deep regret that he had to inform the Board of the passing of Dr Lynne Dawson (Agriculture Branch). The Board acknowledged that it was a sad time for AFBI and particularly for Lynne's colleagues at AFBI Hillsborough and asked the CEO to convey the Board's condolences to those who knew and worked with Lynne.

**CEO****7.2 Representation****7.2.1 Oxford Farming Conference**

The CEO reflected on his attendance at the Oxford Farming Conference during which the AFBI / CAFRE research team were awarded the Royal Agricultural Society of England – Oxford Farming Conference Science Award for PiGIS (Pig Grading Information System).

The Board acknowledged that this was quite an achievement and given the prestige surrounding the event it was suggested that the CEO should notify the DARD Minister of AFBI's success.

Following further discussion the Board and the Executive also accepted the need to consider and agree a mechanism whereby AFBI staff who receive awards can also share in the financial benefits that come with it. The Board therefore agreed that the Chair of the AFBI Remuneration Sub-Committee should meet with the CEO in the first instance to consider this matter in more detail before deciding how best to proceed.

**RC  
Chair/  
CEO****8. Governance Issues****8.1 Risk Management**

The AFBI Business Planning and Risk Management Group met recently and the outturns against business plan targets were considered.

**Action**

A summary of the findings will be submitted to SMT for consideration following which the Executive will table the findings at the February Board meeting.

**Exec**

## **8.2**     Emerging Risk

The Board were made aware of an emerging risk in the AFBI Finance Unit where a number of staff have recently left. The Executive assured the Board that AFBI Senior Management is monitoring the impact on AFBI's business and plans are underway to recruit new staff.

**Exec**

## **8.3**     Whistleblowing and Fraud

The Board were made aware of a letter from a member of staff alleging a breach of the AFBI Research Misconduct Policy.

An invitation has been issued to DARD to undertake an external independent investigation and the Executive will keep the Board informed of developments.

**Exec**

### **8.3.1**   Alleged Underpayment

The CEO informed the Board of a letter he had received from the Ombudsman in relation to a complaint made by a former member of staff.

The CEO advised that he would be taking the Ombudsman's advice when responding.

**CEO**

## **8.4**     Health and Safety

The CEO provided the Board with a report on an incident of sheep worrying that had occurred at AFBI Hillsborough which had resulted in the death of two dogs.

The Board were assured that the staff involved in the incident had not taken any decisions lightly and on the foot of the report provided by the CEO the Board expressed its support for the AFBI staff involved.

## **9.**     **AFBI Personnel**

### **9.1**     AFBI Starters and Leavers Report

The latest figures from the Starters and Leavers Report were presented to the Board for noting and discussion. During the discussion that followed the Executive provided the Board with an assurance that agency staff are not being used to cover staff who had partially retired.

The Executive also agreed that it would revise the *Starters and Leavers Report* with the aim of making the figures more meaningful.

**Exec**

**10. Finance****10.1 Monthly Budget Monitoring Report**

The additional resource received by way of the in-year monitoring round bid had been included in the report with no deficit being predicted for this current financial year.

The Board did express concerns over some of the forecasted figures shown in this report and the Executive accepted the need to adjust future reports.

**Exec****10.2 Cash Flow Report**

The Board noted that there are no emerging pressures in relation to AFBI's cash flow. However, the Chair of the Finance Committee, Mrs McCartan agreed to meet with members of the AFBI Senior Management Team to consider ways of improving the invoicing process during 2012/13 so that AFBI could avoid issuing the bulk of invoices during the final quarter of the financial year.

**FC  
Chair****11. Draft AFBI Risk Management Strategy**

An updated copy of the draft AFBI Risk Management Strategy dated December 2011 was presented to the Board for approval.

On a proposal from Mr Trevor Hinds, seconded by Mr Michael Walker, the Board approved the draft AFBI Risk Management Strategy subject to the Executive making some minor amendments to Section 2- Roles and Responsibilities, Paragraph 2.1 – Board.

**Exec****12. Report from AFBI Board Finance Committee on its meeting held on 17 January 2012**

The Chair of the Finance Committee Mrs Hilary McCartan, provided a report on the Finance Committee meeting held on 17 January 2012.

The Chair confirmed that the Finance Committee had considered the Executive Summary of the 2010/11 AFBI Annual Report and Statement of Accounts in detail and were satisfied that the accounts were well presented and reflected the substantial work carried out by the various AFBI Divisions.

Overall the Finance Committee were very pleased to receive an unqualified set of accounts from the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

**13. Report from AFBI Board Audit Committee on its meeting held on 19 January 2012**

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Mr Bob McCann provided a report on the Audit Committee meeting held on 19 January 2012. The Chair informed the Board that the meeting had focused exclusively on the

2010/11 AFBI Accounts.

**Action**

While the Chair acknowledged that AFBI had received a clean audit report in respect of the 2010/11 AFBI Accounts he highlighted a number of issues that the Executive would need to improve upon in respect of the presentation of the 2011/12 AFBI Accounts.

The Executive acknowledged that one of the issues that may have a bearing on the timeliness of the 2011/12 AFBI Accounts is the Equal Pay Deal. The Executive informed the Board that it would contact DARD for an indication of the current status of the Business Case.

**Exec**

The Board recommended that now was the most appropriate time for the Executive to contact the Northern Ireland Audit Office with the aim of agreeing a timeframe for the 2011/12 AFBI Accounts and identifying any possible issues that may arise or delay approval and publication of the 2011/12 AFBI Accounts.

**Exec**

The Chair also made reference to the Value for Money review being carried out by the NIAO and informed the Board that the first draft of this report is now due in late Spring or early Summer 2012. The Chair of the AFBI Board suggested that at a suitable time in the future he and the CEO would provide the Board with some background information on this review.

**AFBI  
Chair  
& CEO**

In response to the report from the Audit Committee, the Executive advised the Board that it had received the draft Report To Those Charged With Governance from the NIAO and would be providing a management response in due course and any issues arising would be dealt with through the Audit Committee.

The Executive also informed the Board that the review of the 2010/11 AFBI Accounts had also highlighted the likely need for AFBI to introduce an electronic records management system to assist with the faster retrieval of information. The Board expressed its support for any action that the Executive believe is necessary to assist with the maintenance of records and retrieval of information.

**14. Presentation of the 2010/11 AFBI Annual Report and Statement of Accounts (including Executive Summary)**

Following on from the reports from the Finance Committee and the Audit Committee, the Executive presented the 2010/11 AFBI Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for Board approval.

The Board were pleased to note that the income from non Grant-in-Aid had increased by 36.7% since the previous year and accepted that this was a reflection of the magnificent work carried out by AFBI staff but the Board also recognised that such increases may not be sustainable in the future given the ongoing downturn in the economic climate. It was also acknowledged that this income included a substantial "one off" amount in respect of a VAT reclaim.

On a proposal from Mrs Hilary McCartan, seconded by Mr Trevor Hinds, the Board approved the 2010/11 AFBI Annual Report and Statement of Accounts.

## 15. Organisational Review of AFBI - Update on Progress

The CEO provided the Board with an update on the progress of the Organisational Review of AFBI following which there was a lengthy discussion on some of the issues that have been identified so far.

The Board agreed that it was important to keep the momentum of the review going in light of the significant number of Board members who will be leaving at the end of March 2012 and the added need to bring stability to the AFBI Senior Management Team.

In terms of a timeframe for completion, the Executive confirmed that it was expecting a draft report by mid-February 2012, after which the report will be presented to the Board at its meeting on 28 February 2012 and this presentation will then be followed by a further meeting with the review team in the afternoon of the date of the February Board meeting.

## 16. Reports from Divisions

The Board received Divisional reports from each of the four AFBI Divisions highlighting some key developments that have taken place since the date of the previous Board meeting.

### 16.1 Issues Arising from the Report from Veterinary Science Division

Dr Bryson informed the Board that since the circulation of the VSD report Schmallenberg Virus (SBV) had been confirmed in Great Britain. Dr Bryson confirmed that surveillance for the virus is being heightened and various Branches within VSD have been “*tooling up*” to provide local diagnostic capability. There has also been close communication with a number of organisations across Europe which underlines the importance of international research networks and VSD’s close contacts with national and international reference laboratories.

The Board also asked that its congratulations be conveyed to John McKillen (Virology Branch) who has graduated with a PhD in molecular biology and Pauline Baird (Diagnostic Surveillance and Investigation Branch) who was successful in her final FRCPath examinations.

Exec

### 16.2 Issues Arising from the Report from Applied Plant Science and Biometrics Division

In presenting the report from APSBD, Dr Camlin highlighted concerns raised by DARD Quality Assurance Branch at AFBI’s reduced overall capacity and skills and expertise cover for its statutory plant health obligations in the event of another serious plant health emergency. This led to a wider discussion by the Board on the allocation of Grant-in-Aid and AFBI’s emergency response capability.



17. Any Other Business

17.1 Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Previous Board Meetings

The Board were content to note the changes made to the Rolling Database.

17.2 2011/12 AFBI Business Plan and 2011–2015 Corporate Plan

The Executive informed the Board that both the 2011/12 AFBI Business Plan and the 2011-2015 Corporate Plan have now received formal approval from the Department of Finance and Personnel and will be published on the AFBI website.

Exec

18. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the AFBI Board will be held on Tuesday 28 February 2012 in AFBI Stormont (Veterinary Sciences Division) at 10.00am.

**PRESENTATION**

The Board were given a presentation by Dr Pieter-Jan Schon, Fisheries & Aquatic Ecosystems Branch (FAEB) on *Marine Fisheries Science at AFBI – Assessing the Status of Stocks*. During the presentation the Board were made aware of the current issues and challenges in fisheries management. At the conclusion, the Board thanked Dr Schon for his very interesting presentation and for giving it an insight into the work being carried out by FAEB.

The Chair then took the opportunity to present Dr Schon with an International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) Service Award in recognition of his work for ICES as Chair of the Working Group for the Celtic Seas Ecoregion for three years from 1 January 2009.

Signed:

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(Chairperson)

Date:

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