



**Minutes of the Meeting of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute  
(AFBI) Board  
held at**

**AFBI Newforge (Headquarters), Belfast  
on Wednesday 24 March 2010 at 10.30 am**

**Present – Board Members**

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

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

Dr Seamus Kennedy, CEO (Acting)  
Dr Michael Camlin, DCEO  
Dr Arthur Gilmour, DCEO (Acting)  
Dr David Bryson, DCEO (Acting)  
Mr Joel Ferguson, Head of Corporate Services Division (Acting)  
Mr Venkat Deshpande, Head of Finance  
Mr Stephen Cousins, AFBI Secretariat

**Visitors**

Mr Trevor Hinds  
Mr Seamus McCaffrey  
Mr Alan McKeown  
Mrs Hilda Stewart

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

**Action**

Mr Hogan opened the meeting with a word of welcome to all present particularly the four new members of the Board who would be taking up their post on 1 April 2010 subject to formalities being completed.

Mr Hogan then referred to the three members of the current Board who would be leaving, having completed their Term of Office, Dr Christine Kennedy, Mr Nicholas Mack and Mr John McKinley. Mr Hogan stated that it had been a pleasure to have had these members on the Board. He paid tribute to their contribution to AFBI which had earned them the respect of their fellow Board members, and he wished to thank them personally.

In response, Dr C Kennedy said that she had enjoyed her time on the Board and wished AFBI every success in the future. In reflecting on his time on the Board, Mr Mack said that he had gained immense experience which would be of benefit to him in the future. Mr McKinley echoed the sentiments of his two colleagues and thanked the Chair for his kind words.

<b>2.</b>	<b>Apologies</b>	<b>Action</b>
	Apologies were received on behalf of Prof David McDowell, Deputy Chair and Mr John Rankin.	
<b>3.</b>	<b>Conflict of Interests Declaration</b>	
	There were no “ <i>Conflict of Interests</i> ” declared.	
<b>4.</b>	<b>Draft Minutes of the Previous Board Meeting held on 24 February 2010</b>	
	It was proposed by Prof Mulcahy and seconded by Dr Hollywood that the draft minutes of the previous Board meeting be approved subject to the following amendments:	
	<u>Item 7.2 – Budget 2010/11</u>	
	Second paragraph, last line, replace the word “ <i>inspirational</i> ” with the word “ <i>aspirational</i> ”.	<b>Sec</b>
	<u>Item 10 – Report from Audit Committee – meeting held on 2 February 2010</u>	
	Delete paragraph “ <i>Conflict of Interests</i> ” and replace with the following –	
	“ <i>Conflict of Interests – the Board recommended that, following the example of the Audit Committee, agenda for Board meetings, including sub-committee meetings, should include an explicit item to remind members to declare any relevant conflict of interest.</i> ”	<b>Sec</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Matters Arising/Action Points from previous Board Meeting held on 24 February 2010</b>	
<b>5.1</b>	<u>HR Connect (Item 4.1 – Mins 24 02 10)</u>	
	The Executive advised that it had written to Mr Paul Wickens, Director of the Shared Services Organisation (SSO) regarding AFBI’s lack of representation at SSO meetings and will keep the Board informed of developments.	<b>Exec</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<u>Budget 2009/10 – Payments to the Institute of Agri-Food and Land Use (IAFLU) (Item 4.2 – Mins 24 02 10)</u>	
	This matter had been referred to AFBI Sponsor Branch (ASB) and the Executive will keep the Board informed as soon as a reply has been received.	<b>Exec</b>

**5.3**      HR Strategy – Review of Morale and Motivation of AFBI Staff - (Item 4.3 – Mins 24 02 10)      **Action**

The Executive advised that having received comments from the HR Strategy teams, the consultant was making some amendments to the draft report.

As soon as the final version has been agreed and becomes available, the Executive gave an assurance that it will be circulated to the Board.

**Exec**

**5.4**      Business and Science Strategy - Displaying of AFBI Corporate Objectives (Item 4.4 – Mins 24 02 10)

Confirmation was received that this matter was still work in progress with a number of ideas currently being considered.

The Executive agreed to circulate examples to the Board in advance of the next meeting with the aim of reaching a final decision during the course of the next meeting.

**Exec**

**5.5**      AFBI Property Asset Strategy – (Item 4.5 – Mins 24 02 10)

The Executive advised that in light of recent comments/discussion with representatives from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) during which DARD indicated that it was seeking a more defined steer on AFBI's future plans, AFBI was re-examining the strategy.

Although this examination is being hampered by delays in agreeing an overall work plan with DARD, the Executive indicated that a broad document should be available by the next Board meeting and if this was the case the document would be circulated to Board members in advance of the next Board meeting.

**Exec**

**6.      Chairman's Business**

The Chair reported that since the date of the last meeting he had met with senior members of DARD and the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) regarding the appointment of a Chief Executive Office for AFBI.

The Chair assured the Board that this process will be driven by the AFBI Board and that a job description would be presented to members of the Board for final approval. The Chair was hopeful that a job description would be available before the next Board meeting, in which case he would circulate a copy to members for consideration and discussion at a closed session at the end of the next Board meeting.

**Chair**

The Chair also referred to the recent and currently ongoing series of "SMT Roadshows" being presented by the Executive in conjunction with the Board. These "SMT Roadshows" are being held across a number of AFBI

sites and provide an opportunity to brief staff on recent issues. Events to date have been well received and staff have been appreciative. **Action**

In commenting further, the Chair stated that these events have been very useful and provide a direct link with the recommendations from the AFBI Board Effectiveness Review and commended the Executive on their initiative.

## **7. Corporate Issues**

### **7.1 AFBI Risk Management**

#### **7.1.1 *AFBI Corporate Risk Register (CRR)***

In presenting the CRR the Executive highlighted a number of changes that had been made since the last date of meeting.

*Risk No 1 – “Failure to recruit, retain and motivate staff with the right skills, experience and competencies”*

The risk rating associated with this risk has been increased from 3:1 to 3:3 in light of AFBI’s current position on recruitment.

*Risk No 3 – “Insufficient management information to ensure effective budget management”*

The risk rating associated with this risk has been increased from 2:2 to 3:3 to reflect the lack of financial information available at Branch level which will be critical in determining the future sustainability of the organisation.

*Risk No 4 – “Failure to generate sufficient income to deliver AFBI services”*

In light of the current financial and economic position the risk rating has been increased from 1:1 to 3:3.

*Risk No 5 – “Failure to meet customers’ targets and objectives”*

The risk rating associated with this risk has been increased from 2:1 to 3:3 to reflect the possibility of reduced funding and the impact this would have on the level of service that AFBI currently provides to its customers.

On a proposal from Mr Walker, seconded by Dr C Kennedy, the Board accepted the changes to the CRR.

In the discussion that followed the Board expressed some concern regarding Risk No 3 *“Insufficient management information to ensure effective budget management”*. In response the Executive outlined the reason behind the decision to raise this risk which is centred on the inability of the Account NI system to provide the necessary financial

information to the level required within AFBI to enable meaningful decisions to be made. **Action**

The Executive confirmed that it was in the process of examining other financial systems and was on the verge of testing the market through a public tender competition.

The Board acknowledged the need for appropriate and relevant financial information as being crucial to the success of AFBI and were content with the Executive's proposals in examining other options and asked to be kept informed of developments. **Exec**

## **7.2** Whistleblowing and Fraud

The Executive provided the Board with an update on the current cases and advised that in both instances no fraud had been uncovered.

## **7.3** Health and Safety

The Executive informed the Board that there were no major Health and Safety incidents to report since the last date of meeting.

A meeting of the AFBI Health and Safety Advisory Group is due to be held during April and any serious matters arising will be reported to the Board.

## **7.4** Rewards and Recognition to Staff Scheme

The Executive advised that it was seeking a meeting with DARD and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) but at present the matter still resides with DFP. However, the Executive remain hopeful that this matter can be brought to a close shortly.

## **8. AFBI Innovations**

The Board noted the update from the AFBI Innovations Unit in particular, the current position of the *"Marketing and Business Development Strategy"*.

## **9. Draft AFBI Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM)**

The latest draft of the AFBI (MSFM) was presented to the Board for comment and approval.

In the discussion that followed the Board made a number of suggested changes and asked that the Executive seek clarification in relation to the position of the Chair as it appears that this has changed from the original position whereby one possible interpretation is that the AFBI Chair is now responsible to DARD officials rather than the DARD Minister.

In light of the suggested changes and the need to seek clarity, the Board

decided to hold approval until it was satisfied that matters had been addressed. **Action**

The Executive also agreed that it would re-issue the current draft document along with the previous draft so that members could compare and note the proposed changes. **Exec**

## **10. Finance**

### **10.1 Budget Monitoring Report for Financial Year 2009/10**

The Executive presented the monthly Budget Monitoring Report for the period ending 28 February 2010.

In commenting, the Executive stated that there were no dramatic changes to report and it was still predicting a slight underspend for the current financial year (2009/10).

In relation to “*capital expenditure*”, the Executive confirmed that it was confident that all its commitments would be met and the budget expended within the specified timeframe.

The Executive also advised that it had just received notification of the 2009/10 NICS Pay offer for Non-Industrial Staff and would examine the potential impact of this on the current budget.

## **11. Reductions in DARD Grant-in-Aid 2010/11**

The Executive reported that it had presented the draft AFBI Business Plan for 2010/11 to the DARD Departmental Management Board (DMB) and the main issue emerging from this meeting was the deficit in AFBI's funding. In light of this deficit, DMB indicated that it was not content to approve the Plan without an accompanying Contingency Plan. The Executive advised the Board that it was now in the process of preparing a contingency plan and would hope to have a revised Business Plan for 2010/11 in early April 2010.

The Chair acknowledged that this was not an easy task and accepted the view that DARD were now beginning to realise the difficulties that AFBI face as well as gaining an understanding of the extent of the work that AFBI undertakes for DARD.

In the discussion that followed the Board accepted there was a need for DARD to make savings in the current climate but DARD must be made aware that such savings cannot be realised without these savings having an adverse impact on the current work programme, AFBI staff and the future sustainability of the organisation.

The Chair indicated that if it was the wish of the Board, he was content to raise matters at Ministerial level highlighting the financial difficulties that AFBI is likely to encounter. However, it was decided to hold this action

pending further discussion between the AFBI Executive and DARD.

**Action**

## **12. DARD–AFBI Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**

Work is currently ongoing in relation to development of the DARD-AFBI MoU with the main focus on compiling/capturing as much of the work being undertaken by AFBI for DARD and then providing the costs associated with this work.

This is a one-off exercise but when complete the document will be maintained as a “*living document*” and updated as and when required.

The Board were pleased to learn of the progress being made and noted accordingly.

## **13. Personnel**

### **13.1 Pensions Issue**

The Executive confirmed that a briefing session for the 37 former ARINI staff who have opted to transfer their pension accrual benefits from NILGOSC to the PCSPS(NI) had taken place on 18 February 2010 and following this briefing session, 36 have decided to seek individual transfers from NILGOSC and the one outstanding has already retired.

The individual transfers are likely to take up to six months to complete and in the interim AFBI will undertake to complete the transfer of the deficit amount required by the PCSPS (NI) before 31 March 2010.

The Executive also informed the Board that contrary to previous advice from the Departmental Solicitors Office (DSO) provided to DARD, the issue of liability in respect of a cessation payment is less clear. This issue currently rests with DARD and the Executive will keep the Board informed of developments.

**Exec**

In commenting, the Board reflected on the fact that this issue has been on the Board agenda for the last four years and remains unresolved largely because of the conflicting legal advice being presented by the DARD DSO.

### **13.2 Equal Pay**

The Executive are currently waiting on a response from DARD who in turn are waiting on a legal opinion as to whether or not the Terms and Conditions agreed under the Equal Pay Deal are applicable to Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs). In the interim, DARD have advised AFBI to proceed with the preparatory work including a Business Case.

The Executive also highlighted a number of issues that have caused serious concern within AFBI relating to HR Connect’s involvement in the Equal Pay issue and the Board accepted the point that these issues

reinforce the need for AFBI to extract itself from both HR Connect and Account NI.

**Action**

### **13.3 AFBI Human Resource Input to AFBI Board Meeting**

The Executive presented the Board with a paper detailing AFBI staff in post.

The Executive advised that work was ongoing to align the current AFBI staff complement to the various business areas/cost centres within the organisation and would hope to have this completed by the end of April 2010.

The Board made reference to the ongoing use of agency staff. In response the Executive advised that the number had recently been substantially reduced from around 80 to approximately 20 but that these appointments were necessary and those employed covered a wide spectrum of posts within AFBI. However, the Executive confirmed that it was committed to reducing further the numbers of agency staff at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **14. AFBI Board Effectiveness Review**

The Board decided to hold this item until the April Board meeting and the Chair agreed to circulate a paper in advance for consideration and comment.

**Chair**

### **15. Progress Reports on the Implementation of AFBI Strategies**

#### **15.1 HR Strategy**

A combined meeting of the four HR Strategy Teams took place recently and the Acting CEO reported that he was both impressed and reassured by the commitment and enthusiasm of those in attendance.

A meeting between the HR Strategy Teams, the AFBI Senior Management Team and Heads of Branch is scheduled to take place during April 2010.

#### **15.2 Business and Science Strategy**

Several meetings have been held with representatives from DARD to discuss AFBI's work programmes for the department.

The re-run of the tender exercise to appoint consultants to assist in the development of a Marketing and Business Development Strategy is underway and the contract should be awarded in April 2010.

A new business planning process is being developed and should be implemented shortly.



The excellent work carried out by staff in Biometrics Branch to develop costs for the entire AFBI work programme was acknowledged. This is a valuable in-house resource.

**Action**

### **15.3     Assets Strategy**

As mentioned earlier in the meeting (see Item 5.5) a paper titled the “*AFBI Property Asset Strategy*” is almost finalised and ready for circulation to the Board for approval. If agreed the next stage in the process will require professional assistance.

Another area currently being examined is that of “*lease versus ownership*” but it was decided to deal with this as a separate issue, therefore it has not been included in the AFBI Property Asset Strategy.

The IT team are also continuing to work on a number of issues relating to this strategy but in so doing have highlighted a number of resource issues that will need to be addressed by the Executive.

The Board and the Executive again acknowledged the tremendous work and support provided by Biometrics Branch and the Board agreed that a letter of appreciation from the Chair should be sent to the Branch.

**Chair**

## **16.     Any Other Business**

### **16.1     Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Board Meetings**

The Board accepted the Rolling Database of Issues Raised at Board Meetings.

### **16.2     SMT Away Day**

The Executive confirmed that the AFBI Senior Management Team had held a Strategy Workshop on Friday 5 March 2010 and reported that this had been a useful exercise and a follow-up session to develop an action plan to move matters forward is in the process of being arranged.

### **16.3     Correspondence**

The Acting CEO informed the Board that he had received correspondence recently from two of AFBI’s customers complimenting AFBI staff on the excellent service that had been provided. The Executive acknowledged such correspondence reflected well not only on the individuals and business areas concerned but AFBI as a whole and as such it is very much welcomed.

**Acting  
CEO**

In commenting the Board concurred with the sentiments expressed by the Acting CEO and also asked that the appreciation of the Board be passed on.

## 16.4 North/South Ministerial Council

The Board were informed that a North/South Ministerial Council Agriculture Meeting was taking place at AFBI Hillsborough on 31 March 2010 and Dr Camlin would be making a presentation on the joint work being undertaken by AFBI, Teagasc and UCD.

### 16.5 Rose Energy

The Board were informed that AFBI has provided independent scientific comments to Planning Service in relation to the planning application submitted by Rose Energy in respect of a proposed Biomass Power Plant in County Antrim.

**17. Date of Next Meeting**

The next AFBI Board meeting will take place on Wednesday 28 April 2010 and will be held in the AFBI Boardroom, AFBI (Headquarters) Newforge at 10.00 am.

# AFBI Business Continuity Management Presentation

After the close of business a presentation was given to the AFBI Board by Mrs Pauline Wilson (DID) and Dr Eileen Stewart (AFBI) on AFBI Business Continuity Management (BCM).

Following the presentation the Chair acknowledged the work that has been put into this project which was very significant and thanked Mrs Wilson and Dr Stewart for their presentation. The Executive also paid tribute to the work carried out and thanked everyone involved.

The Executive also confirmed that it was firmly committed to BCM and stated that it was developing a job specification for the post of an AFBI BCM and Contingency Co-ordinator. This job specification will be considered by the Executive and it will decide how best to take forward in light of the current financial climate.

Having noted the next steps in the process the Board gave its unanimous support for the Executive to proceed.

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

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