# Minutes of the Eighth Meeting of the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council

**Venue:** Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin

Date: 15th January 2004

Present: Professor Patrick Fottrell (Chairperson), Barbara Bent, Tom Doyle, Jackie Cahill, John Stack, Alison Hanlon, Angela McCarthy, Stephen Foley, Martin Blake, Dermot Sparrow, Mary-Anne Bartlett, Sean O’Laoide, Colette Connor, Kevin Kinsella, Michael Murphy, Bernadette Earley, Aidan Murray, Derek Deane, Teresa O’Halloran.

## OPENING COMMENTS

The Chairperson opened the meeting by welcoming all of the Council to the first meeting of 2004. He expressed his gratitude to the former Secretary of the Council, David Walsh whom he acknowledged had served all of them exceptionally well. He introduced the new Secretary T O’Halloran.

## 2. PRESENTATION BY CATHAL COWAN AND HILLARY MEEHAN

### FROM TEAGASC NATIONAL FOOD CENTRE (NFC) ON FOOD CHOICE AND CONSUMER CONCERNS ABOUT ANIMAL WELFARE

A copy of the above-mentioned PowerPoint presentation was circulated to all attending the meeting. It detailed the results of a survey undertaken by the NFC over a three-year period to determine consumer attitudes towards animal welfare. The results of this survey reflect the opinions of both Irish and EU consumers and concluded that consumer concerns about animal welfare need to address a number of important issues. The two most important areas of concern are - a) the impact on the well being of the animals, and, b) the impact on food safety, quality and healthiness. The results of this survey are documented in a final report prepared by Teagasc entitled ‘Food Choice & Consumer Concerns about Animal Welfare in Ireland (Project RMIS No. 4543)’, a copy of which was also circulated at the meeting. Mr Cowan concluded that Teagasc now proposed undertaking a further project whereby they intended to test products on consumers in supermarkets to establish whether or not there is a willingness on the consumers part to pay extra for animal welfare friendly produce.

## 3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting were adopted subject to the following changes: -

Page 2 – Working Group on Co-operation – inaccurate to state that a paper would be produced for examination and endorsement at the next meeting. The proper position is that the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAF) are currently preparing a final paper for presentation to FAWAC, possibly at the February meeting.

Page 3 – ICOS are continuing to work on their Welfare Guidelines.

### MATTERS ARISING

**Transport:** DAF stated that the European Commission (EC) proposed changes to the existing Directive on animal transport. These are a large set of proposals with plans to introduce possible changes to stocking densities, resting periods for animals, staging posts, transport, journey times and also changes to transport of horses. The proposals had been worked on throughout the Italian Presidency and it is the ambition of the Irish Presidency to obtain EU Ministerial agreement on the document in April 2004. There are three working parties planned. The EU Chief Veterinary Officers are to meet in February. It is also proposed to hold a meeting in February with interested stakeholders such as the veterinary profession and welfare organisations. The Agriculture Committee of the EU Parliament will meet in March with the possibility of a plenary vote being taken on the issue at that session on the issue.

Overall, progress is being made at EU level, there is some leverage of opinion within Member States (MS) and it is hoped that the matter can be concluded at the April meeting of the Agriculture Council of Ministers. If agreement cannot be finalised within the time frame of the Irish Presidency then the matter will be carried into the Dutch Presidency.

CIWF referred to the proposed meeting with interested stakeholders and wondered if DAF intended to circulate details on the package available before the meeting is held in order that they have the opportunity to study it in advance. DAF stated that there is no compromise document. The intention is to brief all parties concerned at he meeting. The Chairperson asked that DAF keep FAWAC informed of any developments in this area.

**IHWT letter:** DAF confirmed that an invitation had issued to the IHWT however no date has been set for a meeting.

**Fur Farming:** It is proposed to visit a fur farm in June 2004, possibly the 2nd Thursday evening of that month. Prior to the visit it is hoped to have speakers representative of all views on fur farming, speak at the May meeting of FAWAC.

**Working Group on Co-operation:** The IFA stated that they had accepted the concept in principle. A further meeting of the Working Group is to take place with a view to preparing a final paper to go back to DAF. They indicated that they propose to present the paper to their Animal Health Committee and Council for endorsement.

ISPCA has reached formal agreement on the matter. DAF indicated that following agreement by all parties concerned; the Working Group will draw up a formal endorsement paper to be circulated to the FAWAC and possibly to all agents concerned around the country.

The IFA indicated that a meeting would need to be arranged in advance to discuss the press campaign for the official launch of this proposal

The Chairperson indicated that he was anxious to conclude this area of work and if at all possible, he would like the paper circulated before the next meeting of the FAWAC, however the ISPCA stated that this was too important an issue to be rushed through.

## WORK PROGRAMME

**Farm Animal Welfare Education/Guidelines:** The Working Group Chair stated that the Animal Welfare Guidelines for Dairy Farmers were concluded and had been circulated to all interested parties. The Group hoped to meet very shortly to discuss the preparation of welfare guidelines for equines. It was agreed that anybody who wished to submit documents relative to this area for consideration by the Sub-group should send them to the Secretary for circulation. The IFA requested that their equine representative, Mr Timothy O’Regan, be co-opted onto the group. This was agreed.

The Chairperson said that the ‘Guidelines’ were very informative and well received and expressed his thanks to the Sub-group.

CIWF expressed the view that they would like to see Animal Welfare Guidelines drawn up for transport, slaughter and exported animals however the Chair of the Sub-group indicated that at present they were concentrating on animal husbandry aspects.

**Consumer Affairs:** It was agreed to invite Mairead McGuinness, Chairperson, Consumer Liaison Panel (CLP), to speak at the next meeting and perhaps also to invite another CLP representative i.e. Paula Mee of Superquinn, to give the supermarket multiples points of view.

**Fish Farming:** It was agreed that an official from the Department of Marine, Communications and Natural Resources along with Richie Flynn, IFA, should be invited to address the Council during the March meeting. CIWF suggest that the Council also invite Phil Lymbery who is an expert on the welfare of farmed fish. This was agreed.

**Visit to Marts:** As agreed at meeting of 17th November 2003, arrangements are to be finalised for visits in April/May 2004.

**Working Group on Medicines:** The Group Chairperson outlined that the first meeting of this group had taken place and had included a representative from the Veterinary Medicines Section, DAF. The group had defined its objectives and he had prepared a preliminary document for discussion at further meetings. A copy of this document was circulated to all Council members prior to the meeting. DAF indicated that they had profound difficulties with the circulated document as it had not been ratified by all present at the inaugural meeting of the group.

The Chairperson of FAWAC indicated that it was agreed at the last Council meeting that the Group Chair and the Secretary would draw up Terms of Reference for the Working Group on Medicines. The Chair of the Working Group stated that the consumer input into the group was strong; he felt that the Group required more input from DAF and requested that in addition to P Kirwan, a member of the veterinary inspectorate be co-opted onto it. This was agreed.

CIWF indicated that they plan to submit a document to the Group through the Secretary on electrical immobilisation.

IFA stated that the welfare of animals and the availability of veterinary medicines is always an issue on farms. Farmers and Veterinary Practitioners are aware that particular drugs exist to treat animal diseases/conditions but these are not available in Ireland. DAF responded by saying that the Irish Medicines Board had responsibility for licensing of these products and it approved medicines based on the rule, ‘quality/safety/efficacy’. If veterinary medicines are not approved then it must be deduced that they don’t meet these standards. Also, it should be noted that some pharmaceutical companies do not apply to the Irish Medicines Board for approval of their products for purely financial reasons.

The Council agreed that Dr Gabriel Beechnor of the Irish Medicines Board should be invited to give a presentation to the Working Group on Medicines on these issues. It was also agreed that DAF should make a presentation to the Group.

ICMSA complimented the Working Group on its preliminary document.

## NEXT MEETING

The next two meetings are scheduled to take place on 12th February and the 11th March respectively. The Chairman and Secretary will look at the schedule of work for FAWAC and its Sub Groups as well as looking at any proposed visits or intended presentations to be given to the Council. It was agreed that Council meetings would be held in Dublin for the time being.

ICMSA stated that the transport of animals and medicines are very important issues and felt the Council should continue to meet often until these issues have been bedded down.

## 7. AOB

CIWF asked if there existed a link on the DAF Website between its Homepage and FAWAC? IFA queried whether the minutes of meetings should be put on the Website since it is a discussion group? The Chairperson responded by pointing out that the minutes could be made available under the Freedom of Information Act and he also felt it was the proper thing to do in the interest of transparency.

CIWF asked for clarification for the term ‘general consensus’ in relation to decisions made by the Council and expressed concern that non-unaminous decisions could comprise individual groups. SPCA groups agreed.

Both the Chairperson and Veterinary Ireland expressed the view that the Council should adopt a ‘wait and see’ approach to this matter, rather that focus in on ‘exit clauses’ at this stage.

The ISPCA raised the subject of a programme currently being shown on RTE television entitled ‘Vets on Call’ and expressed the view that it gives the impression of being anti-animal welfare. However, the IFA said that the programme dealt with the practicalities of farming and added that, with farming, you are dealing with nature. A lot of farmers and Veterinary Practitioners are isolated and difficulties do arise such as complicated births.

The ISPCA said that the programme did not portray the veterinary profession in a very good light and wondered if any veterinary experts had been consulted in the making of the programme? Veterinary Ireland responded by saying that they certainly had no input into the programme and that many vets would be very disappointed by the programme. The programme appeared to be an unplugged/fly on the wall type with little or no editorial control by the vets concerned. Veterinary Ireland noted that the programme was filmed in the West of Ireland which is a rugged and uncompromising part of the country by nature, life in general there would be much more difficult for farmers than in other parts of the country.

CIWF and the SPCA’s expressed concern about recent reports in relation to the high numbers of on-farm cattle and sheep deaths in Ireland in comparison to other EU countries. Both groups would like to be briefed on this matter at the next meeting.