# Minutes of the Thirty-Fourth Meeting of the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council

**Venue:** Portlaoise Heritage Hotel, Town Centre, Portlaoise, Co. Laois

Date: 18th February 2009.

Present: Professor Patrick Fottrell (Chairman), Heber McMahon (DAFF), Sean O’Laoide (Vet Ireland), Stephen Foley (CILDEHS), Alison Hanlon (UCD), Barbara Bent (WSPCA), Mary-Anne Bartlett (CIWF), Michael Doran (IFA), Dermot Sparrow (Vet. Ireland), Martin Blake (DAFF), Tom Doyle (ICOS), Dr. Bernadette Earley (TEAGASC), Colette Connor (DARDNI), Kevin Kinsella (IFA).

**Apologies:** Mark Beazley (ISPCA),Lorcan McCabe (ICMSA), Richard Kennedy (IFA).

**Secretary:** Tom Farrell.

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting, Chairman advised the Council of Seamus Healy, Assistant Secretary General, DAFF’s retirement, and on behalf of the Council he wished Seamus well in his retirement and thanked him for his support over the years.

# MINUTES

The minutes with amendments were agreed.

# MATTERS ARISING

N/A

***Report from the Working Group on the Early Warning and Intervention System for Animal Welfare Cases (EWS),***

DAFF gave an over view on the progress of the EWS review, which covered issues including how EWS is working, perceived weaknesses, and how EWS could be improved in their area. DAFF expressed their gratitude to all the organisations for their participation in the review.

There was an even divide between those who consider EWS to be working well and those who think it could work better and it was suggested by a number of counties that that in addition to HSE and Gardai, that PVP/Vet Ireland, LAVS and Farm Relief Service should be involved. Limitations in funding were raised by just two counties as a weakness.

Common issues raised:

* The need for improved methods for dealing with repeat offenders
* Animal identification discrepancies e.g. non-registrations (Horses)
* Animals not being fed due to social and financial problems
* Unburied carcases
* Herd owners being reluctant to sell and downsize herds
* Restricted herds sometimes can pose problems because it imposes greater pressure on feed resources
* Horses which has been drawn to our attention at EWS meetings, have been identified as an emerging problem

DAFF advised the Council of an article on the EWS initiative in last months Veterinary Journal by Pat Talty (DAFF VI) President of the Veterinary Council.

DAFF and the HSE held a meeting to discuss the issue of animal welfare cases with a social dimension. It was agreed that National Guidelines/protocol should be developed to respond in a coordinated interagency way to farm animal welfare cases that highlight human, welfare and community needs. The intention is to pilot an agreed protocol in Mayo, Sligo and Offaly and review the outcomes before moving to the next stage of the process.

1. **Report from Education Sub-group,**

Chairman to the Sub-group updated Council on the development of the Pig Welfare guidelines booklet (Due to the weather conditions, the Sub-group meeting last week was cancelled).

CIWF and Teagasc have made useful presentations at previous meetings. Chairman suggested that enrichment is an evolving area and that different enrichment options are used across the EU. It seemed that there is a need for more research into enrichment and what would constitute appropriate enrichment material. CIWF stated that much research has already been done, for example by the European Food Safety Authority. The Chair informed Council the finalised guidelines booklet will not be a legal document but will refer to the legal requirements. The intention is to produce a guidelines booklet, which is practical. The Sub-Group intend to produce a document at the next meeting for Council Members perusal.

CIWF stated that it is illegal not to provide enrichment material. They also stated that they had submitted a letter to the Minister in relation to breaches of EU and Irish legislation on the welfare of pigs.

Veterinary Ireland stated that the provision of enrichment material is a problem in many countries except England, but pointed out that salmonella is more widespread in England than in Ireland.

A Council member suggested that research that Dr. Niamh O’Connell has completed in relation to enrichment material maybe of benefit to the Sub-Group.

The document on Pig Welfare guidelines prepared by the education Sub-group is nearing completion and as normal, will be submitted to council for approval before publication.

# Review of On-farm slaughter

DAFF gave an update on the required sanction from the European Commission to introduce a mark/stamp for carcasses of animal’s euthanised on farm and subsequently used in the national food chain in line with the ‘Guidance for Veterinary Practitioners and Farmers on managing acutely injured livestock on farm’. DAFF stated that they received a number of queries from the Commission on the proposal to which DAFF had replied. Currently the proposal is with the EU.

Some Council Members expressed concern at the time this matter was taking and hoped that there would be a speedy resolution.

# Report from Equine Welfare Sub-group

The Equine Welfare Sub-group advised that a brochure is to be launched by the Irish horse racing and breeding industry entitled “Promoting Responsible Throughbred Ownership”. This document has been prepared to give guidance to horse owners on the care of the horse and options available to prevent horses becoming unwanted and neglected. These options primarily include alternative uses and retirement. They also include end of life decisions, including, euthanasia, humane destruction and disposal.

The Chairman of the Sub-group advised that while there is a lack of slaughter plants, he is aware of expressions of interest regarding the increase of Equine slaughter facilities along with the recent opening of a slaughter plant in Limerick.

# Review on Ritual Slaughter,

Veterinary Ireland stated that negotiations are taking place with the owner of the plant and that they seem committed to run the Stun Assurance Monitor (SAM) demonstration. It is envisaged that a demonstration will be organised in the near future. Veterinary Ireland will pursue the issue with the new owners.

The Secretary stated that the SACAHW Committee are waiting on the findings of the SAM demonstration, before they form a working-group.

# AOB,

# Euro-FAWC

Seán O’Laoide (Veterinary Ireland) represented FAWAC at the Euro-FAWC meeting, He gave the following summary:

The meeting took place from the 13th to the 14th of January in Vienna.

Each national body provided a brief oral update of their current work.

The key presentations at the meeting included the following:

* Castration as a welfare issue (Chaired by Seán O’Laoide), with the following presentations.
  + Netherlands – Immunocastration and other alternatives to castration
  + EFSA – Risk assessment of castration
* Education, transparency and labelling, (Chaired by Finland), with the following presentations.
  + Austria – Animal Welfare goes to School(An interesting aspect of the back to school presentation, that it is backed by a requirement in their animal welfare Code that animal welfare programmes must be facilitated in the Educational System)
  + Great Britain – Welfare Labelling of animal products
* A debate on Anthropomorphism and the different perceptual views of animals, led by David Pritchard, Council of Europe, European welfare surveillance, led by FAWC, GB.

In relation to the key information sharing role of Euro-FAWC it was agreed that a website with links to the National sites would be developed. The Netherlands agreed to host and manage the site with Austria helping in the design of the site.

It was noted, that as part of the Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006-2010, that it was planned to establish a European Reference Site for Welfare and that it was believed the Euro-FAWC would have a key role in this.

## FAWAC Website

The Secretary stated that the New FAWAC Website will go live within the next two weeks.

## Animal Health and Welfare Bill

DAFF reported on the Animal Health and Welfare Bill. DAFF have met with a wide range of organisations that made submissions on the draft summary of the Bill and hope to finalise the consultation process in the near future. This element of the process provides an opportunity for parties to elaborate on their respective submissions. Drafting of the bill will then continue taking account of the further comments received.

**2009 Priorities**

Council decided that Council Members should submit their suggested priorities for 2009 for consideration.

## On-farm conditions for Fur Animals

CIWF distributed a document on ‘Animal welfare concerns regarding on-farm conditions for fur animals’. CIWF will give a presentation on this document at the next meeting.

## Dioxin Pigs

Council Members complemented DAFF on the handling of the Dioxin Feed issue, as there was no negative feedback from the farmers. DAFF also complemented the herd and flock owners for their co-operation and stated that the process of slaughter of these animals is near completion.

## Next meeting

The next Council meeting is on the 29th April 2009.

## Conclusion

Chairman thanked the Council Members for their attendance, and adjourned the meeting.

## END