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

**Location:** Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise

Date: 25th November 2009

Present: Chairperson Professor P Fottrell, H McMahon (DAFF), S O’Laoide (Vet Ireland), L O’Flynn (Vet Ireland), A Hanlon (UCD), B Bent (WSPCA), M A Bartlett (CIWF), M Doran (IFA), T Doyle (ICOS), B Earley (TEAGASC), G O’Hagan (DAFF), S Foley (CILDEHS), M Blake (DAFF), K Kinsella (IFA)

Apologies: C Connor (DARDNI)

Secretary: Alan P O’Brien

Guest Speaker: Joe Collins (UCD)

# Minutes of the last FAWAC Meeting

Minutes of the meeting of 9th September 2009 were adopted with changes.

# Matters Arising

* The Secretary has contacted Professor Monaghan and obtained permission to release the report on Fur Farming. This report will be published to the FAWAC website in the near future. CIWF asked what action the Minister has taken regarding the recommendations in this report.
* CIWF questioned how fur farming would be dealt with by DAFF in light of the revised Programme for Government. DAFF replied that this matter is being examined at present.

# Presentation by Joe Collins (UCD) on Equine Welfare

Joe Collins gave a detailed presentation on the findings from UCD research funded by World Horse Welfare on equine welfare in Ireland covering horse numbers, disposal issues, horse fairs and detailing workshops with traveller men. He also discussed a stakeholder workshop hosted by UCD which examined a range of the issues raised by the research and outlined the findings and conclusions which had emerged from those discussions. (see Appendix 1) DAFF thanked Joe for his presentation and complimented him and his team on their work.

* DAFF stressed that responsibility of the Department of Agriculture in this area is with horses as farmed animals only. The principal responsibility lies with the owner.
* Regarding the extent of the problem, DAFF added:
  + DAFF have been in contact with all stakeholders (DVOs, IFA, ISPCA, Local Authorities and the Horse Industry who have reported no increase in the number of equine related cases this year. While aware of the potential there does not currently appear to be a widespread issue. This issue was discussed at length at EWS meetings.
  + DAFF are gathering information in order to formulate a plan to deal with this ongoing issue.
* Joe Collins informed the Council that UCD funding will end in the Springtime. UCD would like to continue this research and see their role as a forum for discussion rather than an authority on the issue.
  + Sean O’Laoide added that it is very important to recognise that the project includes Social Science as well as animal welfare and gives us a better idea of the type of people we are dealing with in the horse industry.
* Stephen Foley enquired as to the price of disposal.
  + Joe Collins said that it is now €150-200.
* Alison Hanlon highlighted that due to the success of the project in UCD, the same project is being introduced in the UK.
* Tom Doyle asked what the difference is between Category 1, 2 and 3 disposal.
  + Joe Collins explained that Category 1 is the highest cost and risk to dispose while Category 3 is for human consumption.
* Kevin Kinsella pointed out that the vast majority of horses are still well looked after and this should not be overlooked. However, welfare costs money and at present there is very little money.
* Liz O’Flynn said that identification is the key in this issue. This needs industry participation. Microchipping clinics are very important and the DECRA page explaining this could be distributed.
* Joe Collins said that if UCD receives funding they will continue their work. They can also get veterinary students to help with microchipping.
* Bernadette Early said that Teagasc could explore helping on the education side.
* DAFF added that solutions must be driven by the industry.

# Pig Booklet

* The Secretary said that the booklet will be launched by the Minister before the next Council Meeting.

# EWS

* DAFF said that feedback from EWS has been very positive.
  + The role of the HSE is being expanded and Pobail are also involved.
  + It is important to promote the EWS to those who may be in trouble for the first time.
  + Some concern has been expressed over closure of DVOs in some regions.
    - The fodder situation was generally positive after September/October. This will possibly change somewhat after the recent flooding. Cabinet released an initial €2 million in a fodder support scheme.
  + Kevin Kinsella welcomed the funds but suggested that it will be inadequate given the extent of the problem. There is a real concern for both human and animal welfare.
  + Tom Doyle said that fodder is just not available. Emergency movement of animals is needed but is a problem with regulations.
  + Sean O’Laoide said that local vets are happy to be contact points where DVOs have closed.

# Education Sub Group (Sean O’Laoide)

* There has been no meeting of the sub-group since the last council meeting.
* Irene Dunne is moving on from the Department of Agriculture. On behalf of the Education Sub-Group the Chairman complimented Irene on her work, and effort and wished her well in her new role.

# OIE Guidelines

* CIWF said that the OIE are to introduce International Guidelines for on-farm conditions. CIWF are worried that these are much weaker than EU standards. If these standards are set, countries in the World Trade Organisation can claim to be complying with international standards.
* Martin Blake said that the OIE needs to engage as many countries as possible. As yet there have been no discussions at EU level.
* Sean O’Laoide said that up to now there have been no international standards set for trade. These must be watched closely. Kevin Kinsella agreed.

# Cloning

* CIWF said that there has been some movement on cloning legislation.
  + EFSA has highlighted welfare issues for surrogate mothers and cloned offspring.
  + There is a study of stakeholders’ views being done involving Teagasc and Dublin Institute of Technology.
  + CIWF would like FAWAC to advise against the cloning of food animals.
* The Chairman said that this matter will be forwarded to the Scientific Advisory Council for Animal Health and Welfare (SACAHW) to examine the issue.
  + Kevin Kinsella said that he has concerns regarding this issue. Cloning has been approved in the US and he would not like to see a repeat of the GM issue where the EU is the only place where this is banned.

# EuroFAWC

* Sean O’Laoide will represent Ireland at the EuroFAWC annual conference in the Netherlands in January.

# AOB

* Animal Health and Welfare Bill
  + Liz O’Flynn asked if competition horses will be included. DAFF confirmed that they will.
  + Liz O’Flynn asked if registration of owners will be included. DAFF said that while the Bill will allow for this, it will not specify it.
* Alison Hanlon asked if forced moulting of broiler chickens is legal under SI14.
  + Martin Blake agreed to look into this matter.
* CIWF asked if Ireland is on course to meet the requirements for sow housing and enriched cages for laying hens.
  + DAFF said that while it is up to the industry to ensure compliance, grant schemes are available to help. DAFF is stressing the dates to farmers.
* Bernadette Early confirmed that Niamh O’Connell and Laura Boyle will make a presentation on pig welfare at the next meeting.
* The Chairmen thanked all members for their work throughout the year. He expressed his appreciation of the support received from DAFF, right up to the Minister.
* The Chairman thanked Sean O’Laoide for chairing committees throughout the year.
* The Chairman finished by saying that there is a need to examine how the Council is working to ensure it is functioning to its maximum potential. END

# Appendix 1

Presentation by Joe Collins UCD

* UCD research is funded by World Horse Welfare (WHW).
  + WHW have been working in Ireland for 2 years.
  + WHW work to try and achieve sufficient standards in each country.
* Numbers of horses registered in 2009 is down on previous years.
  + This might not be representative of numbers of horses born. High costs and enforcement issues mean that many owners are not registering.
  + High quality horse marts are empty while low quality marts are thriving.
  + Many people look to move their horses on before winter, but when they can’t they run into problems as they haven’t prepared for it.
* People do not want to make hard decisions on disposal of horses. In many cases low quality horses are being bred.
* Disposal
  + Welfare groups can’t handle the volume of horses.
  + Horse meat is a declining market.
    - Horses are being bred lighter so are not good for meat.
    - Many horses have no documents so can’t enter the food chain.
    - Belgium and France must be explored as potential markets as they pay a higher premium than Italy.
    - Other avenues must be explored.
  + At present there are operators exporting 18-20 horses a week. However it is perceived that the UK slaughter market will weaken as public perception grows.
  + Knackeries are available but the main problem is the cost. Horses that need to be taken out of the system are usually worth little and research suggests that their owners are unwilling to pay to dispose of them.
* There are horses in some areas living in a semi-feral environment.
* Horse Fairs
  + Spancil Hill organisers are changing the way it is run. They now charge per animal to enter. Competitions are run in roped off areas. However this is not typical of most horse fairs.
  + Ballinasloe has an area where horses and carts are run in very poor welfare conditions.
  + Smithfield operates with very poor welfare standards.
  + In autumn, some foals have been observed being weaned at the marts.
  + Water troughs get used by humans and become dirty and unfit for consumption.
  + Fodder is not provided by organisers.
  + There are no bio-security measures. Transmission of disease is not dealt with.
  + Gardai reluctant to intervene at these marts as it is an intimidating and sometimes violent environment.
* UCD have conducted Traveller Focus Groups
  + These were completed with two groups - all men. Video clips and photos were shown to illustrate problems.
  + Travellers feel that the horse has a positive role in their community.
  + They defended the conditions under which horses are kept by pointing out that they themselves live in similar or worse conditions.
  + They defended the use of tethers as they are often on other people’s land.
  + There were no positive comments on the Control of Horses Act. Travellers feel that this discriminates against them.
  + They are very suspicious of any form of documents as they feel that this is related to the Control of Horses Act.
* UCD conducted a Workshop to examine the issue of horses in Ireland. This consisted of 31 participants divided into three groups. The groups discussed Horse Disposal and Horse Gatherings and tried to identify problems, solutions and how to implement these solutions.
* Gatherings.
  + Problems.
    - No code of Practice and no licence.
    - Poor identification of horses.
    - Nobody has statutory authority.
    - Gardai are worried about public health and safety but not the welfare of the horses.
  + Solutions.
    - A licensing system is necessary.
    - A code of practice must be introduced.
    - Under the Control of Horses Act 1996) a Local Authority can name an area a ‘control area’.
    - A microchipping service should be offered.
    - A central database should be introduced with a provision for an owner/keeper transfer.
    - These gatherings should be used as an opportunity to educate on good welfare and husbandry practices.
    - High profile people involved with horses should publicise welfare.
  + Implementation.
    - Positive intervention needs to start at better organised gatherings to give it a chance to work. (eg. Spancil Hill and not Ballinasloe).
    - A licence should be introduced to own a horse.
    - Any solutions will need funding which should be provided by the equine industry itself.
* Horse Disposal.
  + Problems.
    - There is no policing of Cross-Border movements to the UK.
    - There is a big difference between horses available for the food chain and those that are not. We could become like the UK where a vet can sign a horse out of the food chain.
    - There is a limited capacity for non-food horses. All these horses must be disposed as Category 1 which has a high cost.
    - Public perception is not disposed to a cull.
  + Solutions.
    - There should be more Category 2 and3 disposal facilities.
    - Abattoirs should be able to take horses not intended for the food chain as well as those that are.
    - The potential for funding a collection for disposal (scrappage scheme) should be explored.
    - Indiscriminate breeding (quantity over quality) needs to be addressed.
  + Implementation.
    - A cull scheme is needed.
    - Responsible breeding and ownership must be promoted.
    - A possible levy on production should be explored.
    - A licensing system must be implemented.