# Minutes of the Fifty-First Meeting of the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council

**Location:** Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise

Date: 19th June 2013

Present: Chairperson Professor P Fottrell, Brid Farrell (DAFM), Michael Sheahan (DAFM), Noel Griffin (ISPCA), Alison Hanlon (UCD), Kevin Kinsella (IFA), Arthur O’Connor (Veterinary Ireland), Barbara Bent (WSPCA), Ray Doyle (ICOS), Henry Burns (IFA), Sean O’Laoide, Bernadette Earley (TEAGASC), John O’Roarke (Veterinary Ireland), Colette Connor (DARDNI), Stephen Foley (CILDEHS).

Apologies:

Secretary: Alan P O’Brien

**Minutes**

The Minutes of the previous meeting (22nd March) were accepted with changes.

1. **Matters Arising**

* There were no matters arising.

1. **EuroFAWC**

* Sean O’Laoide gave a summary of the 2013 EuroFAWC Conference held recently in Belgrade. There were attendees from 21 countries and the Commission. Some non EU members attended, including Serbia, as an accession country to the EU, Serbia is attempting to bring its animal welfare standards up to speed with the rest of Europe.
* Issues discussed included:
  + EU Commission examining basic welfare law.
  + Pain experienced by fish during angling (Denmark)
  + Guidelines for exotic animals.
  + Genetic diversity of dogs (Norway/Belgium)
  + Housing of horses.
  + FAWAC Equine Codes of Practice (Presentation by Sean O’Laoide)
  + Fairground Ponies (Belgium)
* EuroFAWC has a new website and the Commission has agreed to fund the translation of documents. EuroFAWC has the potential to be a great network for engagement by other Member States.

1. **Education Working Group**

* In advance of the next FAWAC meeting, the IFA will liaise with FAWAC Secretary to progress the codes issue.

1. **EWS**

* DAFM gave an update on the fodder crisis.

The Minister launched the Imported Fodder Transport Scheme (IFTS) on 24 April 2013 which provided up to €2 million to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage (hay, silage, haylage) from outside the island of Ireland. The scheme operated through the Dairy co-operatives (milk purchasers)/marts and deliveries through Co-Ops /marts ran to over 2,300 loads – the equivalent of over 34,000 tonnes of fodder.

* The Department operated an enhanced Early Warning System emergency helpline for those affected by the crisis and experiencing serious animal welfare issues. Over 1,100 calls were received and 475 farmers were aided to a total of over €170,000. The majority of the callers were enquiring about the IFTS and were referred to their nearest Co-Op/ Mart for details of nearest source of supply.
* Council agreed that on foot of the fodder crisis the focus must now move to planning for the future and working on preventative measures.
* The IFA said that the very poor Spring weather had created major difficulties for farmers who normally would not be experiencing problems. It expressed its disappointment overall with the official response despite the success of the IFTS. In its view, Department inspections and penalties are too harsh and farmers now have the added financial burden. There is still a fear that availing of the EWS will bring down the wrath of the Department at a later date. The IFA said that there are two problems – the weather and finance. Direct payments have been targeted which has had an effect. Livestock numbers are actually down. There is a need to transfer the short term credit problem to a longer term low-interest manageable solution and there needs to be a bigger budget allocation to assist farmers manage their debts. IFA said that farming bodies had provided significant money towards helping farmers and that there was a lot of goodwill shown between farmers.
* DARD said that its Minister gave £1 million towards the transport of 9 thousand tonnes of fodder and £5 million in severe weather payments. Tyrone and Fermanagh were the worst hit. The EFU played a strong role in helping with the crisis.
* It was suggested that Ireland needs to develop a better contingency plan for dealing with adverse and unpredictable weather conditions, although this did not receive support from all Council Members due to other issues that may emanate from this.
* The IFA and Vet Ireland believe that in terms of farm animal numbers, Ireland is not overstocked. Vet Ireland said that while knackeries were busy during the fodder crises, PVPs were not.
* DAFM said that the number of fallen animals in early months of 2013 is broadly similar to 2009 levels but are up compared to 2012 figures.
* CILDEHS said that it believes DAFM needs to re-examine its inspection regime as farmers are scared.
* DAFM said that it is important that work continues on this and that there is no relaxing due to summer weather and that the agri-food industry, particularly the dairy co-ops need to increase its support to those farmers experiencing financial difficulties.

# Equine Welfare

* DAFM said that the removal of the slaughter for human consumption option has reduced considerably the disposal option. While 24,000 horses were slaughtered last year, only 5,000 have been slaughtered to date in 2013 which would indicate that there are a lot of unwanted horses left within the system.
* The ISPCA said that a number of solutions must be examined:
  + Enforcement of Equine ID (will force owners to be more responsible if they can be traced).
* Sean O’Laoide said that there is an issue with people trying to take adverse possession of lands through leaving horses on it illegally. This must be addressed.
* The Chair called a meeting of the FAWAC Equine Liaison Committee to discuss potential solutions to this problem.

# AOB

*Pig Enrichment and Sow Welfare*

UCD said that it has research that could be presented to the Council. Dr. Niamh O’Connell, Queens University who is undertaking research on this area will also be approached.

*Animal Health and Welfare Bill*

* The Secretary said that the Bill was enacted into law and a commencement date will follow in the autumn.

*Acutely Injured Animals*

* Vet Ireland gave a report on the subgroup which met on this issue.
  + The short-term goal is accumulating accurate data of injuries.
  + The long-term goal is a detailed study possibly at Masters level.
* Both of these are with a view to prevention of injuries as well as identifying the feasibility of solutions where injuries do occur.

***End***