

Minutes of AFSB Meeting 31: Friday 3rd February 2017

Time	14.00 – 16.30	
Venue	Netherleigh Building, Massey Avenue, Stormont	
Present	Tony O'Neill (Chair)	
	Declan Billington Trevor Lockhart Brian Dolaghan Eugene Rooney	Francis Martin Ian Marshall Normal Fulton
Apologies	Jim Dobson Owen Brennan David Small	John Thompson David Dobbin
Observers/Officials	John Hood, Invest NI Trevor Connolly, DfE	Colette McMaster, DAERA Elaine McCrory, DAERA
Support Team	Fiona McCausland, DFE Amanda McIlwaine, DFE	Emma Murphy, DAERA

1. Welcome

The Chair thanked all for attending, introduced Trevor Connolly, Department for the Economy, who has replaced Mike Thompson, and noted the apologies from those who could not attend.

2. Minutes of the last meeting & Chair's Update

It was noted that there were no actions arising from the last meeting held on 18th November 2016 and the minutes were agreed.

The Chair advised that a substantial amount of work had taken place since the last meeting. A number of meetings had taken place with industry representatives, officials and stakeholders on the specifics of the Livestock Genetics project and the Strategic Marketing Organisation resulting in progress being made on both fronts. He had also represented the agri-food sector at various meetings on the potential impact of BREXIT.

The Chair informed the meeting that the Ministers had extended the tenure of the AFSB until 31 May 2017 and reminded members that it was important that the Board drive the Livestock Genetics project and the Strategic Marketing Organisation forward over the next few months.

3. Update on the Agri Food Marketing Body

Eugene provided an update on work on the proposed model for the Agri Food Marketing Body including how the private sector would contribute to the organisation.

He updated Members on the changes that had taken place since the last Board meeting in November and explained that a revised paper had now been produced on the proposed model which would be industry-led, have linkages with other partners

and have a structure which would allow the body and delivery partners to work together as part of an Executive Advisory Committee. He advised that the paper had benefited from input from the industry representatives, the two Departments and Invest NI.

Francis asked what the time table was regarding the next steps. Eugene stated that, if AFSB could agree and endorse the proposed model, then DfE would seek Ministerial agreement to the model which would allow the Departments to progress the Business Case. He felt that it would take some time to produce a robust Business Case which clearly demonstrated the value for money case supporting both the Body itself and any associated programme funding. He noted that in respect of the approval process, the Business Case would then have to go through both the DfE and DAERA Ministers and then the Department of Finance.

There was some discussion around the budget required for the organisation, including the private sector contribution, and what information would need to be included in the Business Case.

Tony confirmed that discussions were currently ongoing with industry representatives and the relevant agri-food sectors in Northern Ireland regarding the development of a new 'Levy Collection Body' which would collect and disseminate industry funding, from all sectors across the agri-food and wider food and drink sectors, to support industry initiatives such as the Genomics project and the Agri Food Marketing Body. Members noted that whilst industry had agreed, in principle, to the creation of a new levy collection body, industry were seeking further details in respect of both its inputs and outputs, before formally signing up. Thus it was difficult to finalise a levy collection model without also confirming details in relation to how the money would be spent.

Norman suggested that NIFQAS as a source of revenue be removed as it was committed elsewhere, and would not be available as additional spending power unless the scheme was absorbed into the organisation. Tony agreed that the NIFQAS figures be removed.

Tony confirmed that AFSB accepted the proposed model. Eugene confirmed that work to develop the Business Case would be progressed as quickly as possible but noted that the process would be challenging and that details would be required from industry. Eugene also noted that the current Articles of Association of the NI Food Marketing Association Ltd company would need to be reviewed.

Action Point 1: Reference to the proposed 'Levy Collection Body' should be included in the Agri Food Marketing Body discussion paper before it went to the two Ministers.

Action Point 2: The table currently included in the paper showing the Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIFQAS) fees will be removed.

Action Point 3: Agri-Food Marketing Body paper to be amended as agreed at this meeting before being sent to the Ministers.

Action Point 4: DfE to commence work on the Business Case, which would be shared with AFSB Members for inputs before being finalised. This would require input from DAERA, INI and AFSB industry representatives. Note to be issued, as soon as possible, setting out the information that would likely be required from industry for the Business Case.

4. Update on the Genomics Project

Ian provided a brief background to the project noting that successful livestock genetics development requires a comprehensive collection of animal performance information, which can then be shared with industry to bring about behavioural change. The project is intended to overlay onto existing systems, such as APHIS, and establish a team of experts who would work with farmers to help them make breeding decisions which would make businesses more sustainable.

It was noted that this is another project with widespread industry support, as evidenced by the fact that industry had paid for the first phase of the work. All agreed that uptake would be a critical factor in securing behavioural change.

Ian confirmed that the Business Case for the project was currently being finalised, with the intention to submit it in the next few days.

Tony indicated that he would be interested in having a meeting with DAERA to discuss the interaction with APHIS, particularly in terms of collecting sire data.

Action Point 6: Meeting to be arranged between Tony, Norman and Robert Huey.

(Note: Meeting took place on Tuesday 07 February and concluded with agreement that AFSB requests will be incorporated into the next release of APHIS scheduled for late summer 2017.)

5. Update on the Land Management Strategy

Norman provided an update on the Land Management Strategy and confirmed that a pilot soil testing programme (funded through EU Exceptional Aid Adjustment) would take place this year. He noted that DAERA are working with the Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to develop this programme and advised that it would only work long term if farmers changed their behaviour/soil management regime in order to capture the benefits.

6. Update on Work re Funding Mechanisms

Tony confirmed that work on the Funding Mechanisms was pushing ahead with lots of work having already been done. It was agreed that there was no need to give any further update on the Funding Mechanisms as it had already been discussed and covered during the Agri Food Marketing Body discussion.

7. Update on Supply Chain Forum

Tony reminded everyone that the event was taking place on Wednesday 8th February in Greenmount and noted that there were 75 confirmed attendees for the event at the moment. He advised that there were three speakers, Declan Billington, David Dobbin and Peter Kendall, addressing the impact of Brexit and the outworking of the EU Agricultural Markets Task Force.

8. Any other Business

No other business was raised.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on 07 April 2017, 2.00pm – 5.00pm in InvestNI, Bedford Street.