# Minutes of the Twenty Eight Meeting of the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council

**Venue:** The Fitzwilliam Hotel, St. Stephen’s Green, Dublin 2.

Date: 28th November 2007.

Present: Professor Patrick Fottrell (Chairman), Brid Farrell (DAFF), Martin Blake (DAFF), Sean O’Laoide (Vet Ireland), Stephen Foley (CILDEHS), Alison Hanlon (UCD), Barbara Bent (WSPCA), Mary-Anne Bartlett (CIWF), Kevin Kinsella (IFA), Lorcan McCabe (ICMSA), John Bryan (IFA), Colette Connor (DARDNI), Richard Kennedy (IFA), Tom Doyle (ICOS), Angela McCarthy (ISPCA).

**Apologies:** Dermot Ryan (DAFF)), Dermot Sparrow (Vet. Ireland), Dr. Bernadette Earley (TEAGASC).

**Secretary:** Tom Farrell.

Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly to Tom Farrell who has taken over as secretary of the Committee replacing Teresa O’Halloran.

# MINUTES

Minutes adopted with an amendment by Mary-Anne Bartlett who had stated at the meeting that ‘electrocution as a method of slaughter of foxes is publicly unacceptable’.

# MATTERS ARISING

None

# ON-FARM SLAUGHTER

DAFF stated that this document - now entitled ‘Guidance for Veterinary Practitioners and Farmers on Managing Acutely Injured Livestock On-farm’ has been presented to the meat industry and hopefully will be ready for the Council by the next meeting. Stephen Foley raised an issue involving a truck carrying pigs overturning at a roundabout in Sligo. Brid Farrell responded by saying that she was aware of the incident, which occurred on the 19th November, and Department officials had responded quickly and had acted professionally and efficiently in what was a difficult situation. Arising out of the incident the DAFF will consider and evaluate how best provision might be made to deal with similar incidences in the future. In this case, DAFF personnel were able to avail of a humane killer from a local butcher. Sean O’Laoide stated that there should be a written protocol drawn up on how to respond to such incidents. Chairman asked DAFF to revert at the next meeting of council with its thoughts on how this matter might be progressed.

# ANIMAL WELFARE ECONOMICS

Dr. Bernadette Earley has commenced a large winter study in Teagasc, Grange on Animal Welfare and Economics. She will submit the application to Teagasc, as an application for funding in the next call for Walsh fellowship applications (early 2008), this will entail ‘Linking Economics with Farm Animal Welfare’, she is proposing to get funding for a student undertaking PH D studies in this area.

# EDUCATION SUB-GROUP

Sean O’Laoide stated that the Broiler Welfare Guidelines are near completion and will be circulated for council’s approval. When this is complete, welfare guidelines for pig farmers will be drafted.

# EQUINE WELFARE LIAISON GROUP

Sean O’Laoide and Barbara Bent attended a meeting with representatives of Horse Racing Ireland and Horse Sport Ireland. They spoke about the issue of horse welfare particularly identification and registration of horses. All agree on the necessity for tightening up procedures, but urge caution on the issue.

Barbara Bent also queried the position on:

* Number of horses going out of the country?
* Number of horses being slaughtered?
* Position regarding “Sulky Racing” Reference was made to the proposed EU legislation in the area of equine identification, and to an additional DAFF initiative on monitoring compliance with current legislative requirements at venues where equine sales are taking place – to commence in the New Year.

# REPORT FROM RITUAL SLAUGHTER GROUP

Sean O’Laoide briefed the council on the setting up of a demonstration in the use of stunning before slaughter with the Islamic Cultural Centre Dublin (ICCD). He referred to a domestic plant in Offaly, which has agreed to host a demonstration within the next two months, and he hopes for a successful outcome. Mary-Anne Bartlett asked if the demonstration was for sheep only. Sean responded by saying initially on sheep but will deal with cattle in the future.

A review and a discussion with Meat Industry Ireland (MII), on a welfare document on slaughter will be compiled next year. Some points suggested from council that may be included in the document are - Training of Operators in stunning and responsibility on stake holders to ensure that stunning is in use.

Mary-Anne Bartlett spoke about and quoted from a scientific based document circulated before the meeting. This document included views put forward by the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council. Both reviewed the existing science and concluded that all slaughter should be carried out with pre-cut stunning. Sean O’Laoide was complimented for his work in this area and it was suggested that SACAHW should be involved.

Chairman thanked Mary-Anne for the production of the scientific based document. He added that the FAWC-UK put forward the same document but the UK government did not act on it. The Chairman also stated that this issue is on the agenda for sometime and he would like to get it resolved. He stated that Mary-Anne’s document is a scientific document and that it should be passed on to the SACAHW.

Lines of action suggested by the Chairman;

* Refer issue and Mary –Anne’s document to the SACAHW
* Get ICCD opinion on demonstration of pre-stunning before slaughter

Angela McCarthy stated that if no progress is being made, the Council should come out and say that slaughter without pre-stunning is inhumane.

Chairman concluded that this issue might be referred to SACAHW and wished Sean O’Laoide all the best in his work relating to this issue. The issue will be reviewed at the next council meeting.

# WORKING GROUP ON CO-OPERATION (EWS)

Brid Farrell referred to the EWS, which is generally working satisfactorily throughout the country. She referred to contacts being made with the HSE and the Gardai and with Private Veterinary Practitioners in an effort to get more active engagement from these agencies. Reference was made to the results of the questionnaire completed by EWS county groups as part of the EWS review. Weaknesses identified include, staff availability / lack of collective approach in some regions / repeat offenders. Issues identified for further consideration include consolidation of interaction between groups at local level / DAFF to identify potential animal welfare problems at local level as this is proving effective in county’s where it is undertaken. Concern was expressed on the likelihood of poor nutritious feed available due to the poor summer weather and the high cost of grain prices on world markets and this would require vigilance on the part of the EWS as it may give rise to potential welfare problems over the coming months. Kevin Kinsella queried availability of additional resources from DAFF on operation of EWS. Ms Farrell responded that there is already considerable resources being invested in the EWS in terms of time and effort by all the organisations, IFA, ISPCA and DAFF veterinary personnel and the question of lack of resources has never been raised but if this was raised as an issue it will be addressed at future EWS meetings. It was suggested that there could be more publicity on EWS and mention was made that the system has been advertised on local radio in some areas (particularly Wexford) and that the possibility of wider advertisement of the service will be examined. The Council wanted it noted that there be more vigilance over the coming months on animal welfare.

# CALF EXPORTS

Sean O’Laoide stated that vaccination of weanlings was a good initiative and useful as a preventative measure for illness in calves. Colette O’Connor added that the Netherlands and Italians are very impressed by degree of calf welfare on calves arriving from Ireland. Mary-Anne Bartlett expressed concern on export of calves under six weeks. John Bryan expressed concern that Council might restrict export of live calves.

# SUCKLER COW WELFARE SCHEME – Incentives to disbud

DAFF stated that the October commission meeting has given the go ahead for the Scheme.

Points include:

* Improve welfare of suckler cows
* Age of cow at first calving
* Age of calf at disbudding
* Castration or disbudding does not happen at weaning time
* Disbudding must happen less than 3 weeks of age
* No compulsion on farmers on castration, a farmer can produce bull beef

Sean O’Laoide stated that certain breeds would be excluded; Friesian cows should be culled quicker and not included into suckler herds when culled off the dairy herd.

Mary–Anne Bartlett wanted to know under what circumstances could a local anaesthetic be administered to calves less than 3 weeks of age. DAFF responded that a local anaesthetic (Procaine) could be made available to farmers under prescription by their veterinary practitioner. The veterinary practitioner must be satisfied that the medicine is to be used for the intended purpose and that he/she has a responsibility to ensure that anyone to whom they issue a prescription knows how to administer it. The FAWAC committee was satisfied with this procedure and Chairman asked DAFF to provide a document on the subject, in particular clarifying the position regarding the availability of local anaesthetics. Dr. Alison J Hanlon stated that there is a perception that young animals feel less pain than older animals. This is incorrect as young animals feel more pain.

Kevin Kinsella stated that training/education was an integral part of the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme and that Teagasc is going to run training on all aspects of the scheme – this should include the correct method of disbudding and the use of local anaesthetic. Mary-Anne Bartlett stated that an advertisement should be put on all the main farmer papers regarding use of anaesthetics.

#  FUR FARMING

1. Chairman read out a letter sent to the Minister from Dermot Ryan, outlining the concerns of the FAWAC committee in relation to the use of electrocution, as a method of slaughter of foxes. The DAFF and Veterinary Ireland reports on fur farming have been referred to a sub-group of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Welfare. The Sub-group will review the issue on the basis of the physical and psychological effects on fur farmed animals. Their views will be based on scientific studies, and all methods of slaughter used will be explored. The sub-group will report to the Minister and to FAWAC on its findings. The Chairman expressed urgency on this matter.

Kevin Kinsella enquired if there is a veterinary presence when fur farmers are engaged in slaughtering, and the response was that there is not a full time VI present for all the slaughtering. Mary-Anne Bartlett queried how long it takes these animals to die and her view was that there are insufficient scientific studies on the matter. Chairman concluded this discussion saying, that we shall await the report from the sub-group of the Scientific Advisory Group

# AOB

AFIT

Reference was made to the new AFIT (**A**griculture **F**ield **I**nspection & **T**esting) system, which has already been rolled out to four DVO’s, and that it contains four modules, one of which related to animal welfare and which would assist in capturing information in relation to on-farm welfare. The Chairman suggested that DAFF provide a further update on the new system in 2008. .

**Invitation to Minister**

Chairman enquired if the Minister would be available to launch the “Broiler Welfare Guidelines” or the “Best Practice for the Welfare of Animals during Transport Guidelines” in the New Year. Brid Farrell stated that the Minister values the contribution Council makes in the area of animal welfare and she will convey to the Minister the Council’s invitation to launch the Transport booklet. The Broiler Welfare guidelines are currently being compiled.

**FAWAC Webpage**

Chairman asked the Secretary to examine the FAWAC website with a view to updating it.

**Schedule of Meetings for 2008**

The schedule of FAWAC meetings for 2008 was circulated and the Committee agreed with the schedule and that the meetings should take place in Portlaoise, as it is more suitable venue for commuting purposes.

**Animal Health and Welfare Bill**

Enquires were made on progress of the draft animal health and welfare bill. Some committee members enquired about content and if they could view the draft and make a submission to the bill. Brid Farrell responded by saying that the in-house discussions were nearing completion and pending this, no decision had been taken on the form of consultation. The intention is to have the Bill as comprehensive as possible. Legislation from Northern Ireland, England and Scotland is also being examined for comparative purposes. Colette Connor DARDNI representative indicated they were also reviewing their welfare legislation and requested that any submissions be also sent to them, so that these issues could be examined on an all Island basis.

**Next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 20th February 2008. Minister’s availability to launch booklet on 20th February is to be ascertained following which the meeting may have to be re-scheduled (in terms of both time and place) to accommodate the Minister’s diary.

## Conclusion

Chairman thanked the Council Members for their work throughout the year. He also thanked Minister Coughlan and her DAFF officials for their contribution to the area of welfare and extended an invitation to Asst. Secretary General Seamus Healy to attend a future meeting of the Council. The Chairman also thanked Teresa O’Halloran, the former Secretary and undertook to send her a letter of appreciation on behalf of the FAWAC committee

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