

Minutes

MEETING OF THE FARM ANIMAL WELFARE ADVISORY COUNCIL (FAWAC)

Date: 14th January 2026

Venue: UCD Lyons farm, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.

Meeting Time: 10.30am – 13.00pm

Attendees:

Joseph O’Flaherty (Chair), Mary McCarthy (DAFM), Kevin Galligan (DAFM), Stephanie Ronan (DAFM), Donal Callaghan (IFA), Elizabeth O’Flynn (Vet Ireland), David Hall (IFA), Ray Doyle (ICOS), Siobhan Mullan (UCD), Catherine McAloon (UCD), Michael O’Connell (ICMSA), Noel Murphy (ICMSA), Alan Walsh (DAFM).

Online: Bernadette Earley (Teagasc), Mairead Cooney (DAFM), Catherine Lawler (DAFM), Eliana Lima (EFSA).

Apologies: Declan Hanrahan (IFA), Martin McElearney (IFA), Liam Devine (DAFM), Aidan Cahill (DAFM).

1. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was agreed without amendment.

2. Approval of Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved without amendment.

3. Action points and matters arising

Action Point: DAFM to recirculate De Buitelaar presentation (from the previous meeting) to Veterinary Ireland.

Action Point: DAFM to follow up with Veterinary Public Health division (DAFM) on any potential overlap between the proposed work on a calf welfare CoP and a separate Biosecurity CoP, also under development.

Action Point: DAFM to circulate a link to an item on non-stun slaughter, which was recently discussed on the RTÉ *Liveline* programme.

4. Work Programme for 2026

The Chair proposed that members would put forward suggestions in relation to the 2026 work programme prior to the next meeting, noting that any suggestions would require group consensus, before adoption.

The immediate priority for FAWAC members will be interacting, both as individual organisations and collectively under the auspices of the Council, with the new DAFM Animal Welfare strategy, which is under development.

- **Action Point:** Chair to draft paper highlighting priority areas for 2026.
- **Action Point:** Chair to agree Work Programme for remainder of the year at the next meeting.
- **Action Point:** DAFM to invite representative from AIM division to give update on implementation of report by Professor Patrick Wall on equine traceability and welfare.

5. Beef Cattle Welfare (Recent EFSA opinion)

A presentation on the EFSA opinion on beef cattle welfare was made by two of its authors (one joining by video link), highlighting a number of aspects of the report that may be of particular relevance to Ireland. The presentation also described the process followed in developing the opinion, the report's terms of reference and certain aspects of the methodology used to develop the space allocations cited in the report.

In the Questions and Answers that followed, members sought clarification in relation to a number of matters, including:

- Methodology and modelling behind the study.
- Calculations relating to space allowances.
- Variation in the period of housing in different member states of the EU (noting that the housing period in Ireland is relatively short).
- The extent to which expert elicitation (as opposed to peer-reviewed publications) was used in the Opinion.
- In relation to painful procedures: the animal welfare consequences at group level of not disbudding or castrating cattle; the cut-off age for carrying out such procedures; and research on stress associated with sedation.

Concerns were raised by a number of members in relation to the reliance of certain recommendations in the opinion on expert knowledge elicitation (EKE), rather than peer-reviewed scientific articles. This was of particular concern to some members in relation to the methodology used to estimate space allowances for cattle. Members also queried whether the welfare effects at animal group level of disbudding and castration were taken into account, as a counterbalance to considerations of the welfare effects at individual

animal level. Concern was expressed that the distinction between the use of EKE, as opposed to peer-reviewed scientific articles, in the determination of space allowances will not be taken into account by the European Commission, and that the recommended space allowances would therefore be used as the basis for legislation.

Responding to this last point, the authors clarified that the opinion is just one element of a process that would be followed if new legislation on beef cattle welfare were to be introduced in the EU in the future. An impact assessment would likely be the next step, during which factors other than animal welfare – such as economics and environmental impact – would be taken into account. DAFM informed the group that there is likely to be a lengthy process to follow, involving stakeholder feedback, which could shape the final version of any potential legislation.

- **Action Point:** Teagasc to share a publication, cited in the Opinion and discussed by members during the meeting.
- **Action Point:** UCD/EFSA to confirm if the space calculations in the EFSA opinion take account of whether cattle are horned or otherwise
- **Action Point:** Chair to include an item on the EFSA opinion on the agenda of a meeting later this year.
- **Action Point:** DAFM to provide a status update on scientific opinions on animal welfare and associated legislative proposals for all species.
- **Action Point:** UCD/EFSA to circulate EFSA opinions on the welfare of pigs and poultry (in response to a query raised by a member).
- **Action Point:** UCD/EFSA to circulate the infographic and plain language summary developed to accompany the Opinion.

6. DAFM Animal Welfare Strategy

DAFM provided the group with an overview of the aims of the new Animal Welfare strategy and the process involved in developing same, including the non-statutory public consultation which ran from 19th November 2025 – 2nd January 2026. DAFM are currently collating all submissions received as part of the public consultation, prior to proceeding to develop a first draft of the strategy. It is expected that the strategy will be finalised and published within the first quarter of 2026.

- **Action Point:** DAFM to provide the Chair with a summary of the collated responses of stakeholders under the public consultation process.
- **Action Point:** Chair to draft a consensus document on behalf of the Council for submission to DAFM as part of the public consultation process.

7. Establishing the Code of Practice subgroup on calf welfare Calf

The Council discussed the sub-group terms of reference and the importance of clearly distinguishing legislative requirements from best practice recommendations. The chair of the sub-group will convene a meeting to progress the Code of Practice and will provide regular reports to FAWAC.

8. Website

The process of moving existing documentation from the live website to the new website has begun. When finished, regression testing will take place to identify and resolve any bugs. The intention is to have the new website live before the next meeting of the Council.

9. AOB

The Chair confirmed that DAERA had proposed that Mr. Chris Andrews, who is responsible for animal welfare policy, will represent that department at future FAWAC meetings.

Next Meeting: 15th April 2026