

Food Wise 2025 High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC) Meeting
9th March 2017

Attendance:

DAFM: Minister Creed, Secretary General Aidan O'Driscoll, Kevin Smyth, Bill Callanan, Cecil Beamish and Áine Kilroy

State Bodies: Gerry Boyle, (Teagasc), Tara McCarthy (Bord Bia), Michael Keatinge (BIM), Julie Sinnamon (EI), Orla Battersby, (EI) and Matthew Crowe (EPA)

Other Government Depts: Clare Dunne (DJEI) and Gráinne McGuckin (DPER)

Secretariat (DAFM): Sinéad McPhillips & Siobhán Dowling

Apologies Brendan Gleeson, Brian Carroll (DCCCNr) and Ken Spratt (DTTAS)

Introduction:

Minister Creed welcomed the Committee to the ninth meeting of the HLIC.

Minister Creed welcomed Tara McCarthy to her first HLIC meeting as CEO in Bord Bia and he also welcomed Michael Keatinge (the acting CEO) of BIM.

He referred to the following developments since the previous meeting of the 8 December:

- The successful Trade Mission to the Gulf States the end of February, with the assistance of Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland. This trip included an agreement on enhanced access for Irish beef and sheep meat access to Saudi Arabia.
- The launch of 2017 as the year of sustainable grassland, one of the key actions for 2017 outlined in Steps to Success 2016.
- DAFM hosted the third Water Forum whose purpose was to pull together work done across whole range of DAFM Divisions and agencies and look at it through water quality lens.
- The Egyptian market was re-opened for Irish beef in January.
- Bord Bia released its Sustainability Report 2016
- Teagasc held an important seminar on dairy sustainability.
- BIM launched a Resource Efficiency Guide aimed at seafood processors to assist them to operate more sustainably at the annual Green Awards 2017 on the 21 February.

Minister also referred to the Oireachtas Report on the 'Impact of the UK referendum on membership of the European Union on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors' published in February, including a recommendation for a review of Food Wise targets in the light of Brexit. He stressed his view that implementing the detailed recommendations in Food Wise 2025 was more important than ever in view of the challenges which will arise from Brexit.

Agenda Item 1: Minutes of 8 December meeting

Minutes agreed.

Item 2: Brexit

Minister Creed referred to the Sectoral Dialogue focused on the seafood sector and potential impacts it could face from Brexit on 1 February. He stressed that Brexit is foremost on Government's agenda.

S McPhillips provided an update on the €150 million Agri Cashflow Loan scheme which has been fully allocated in terms of loan approvals. SCBI will begin to provide detailed information as loans are drawn down by farmers over the next few months. DAFM will analyse this information and have to provide detailed reporting to the Commission by October. This analysis will be published.

Ms Dunne gave an overview on what DJEI are doing and referred in particular to the outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative research of SMEs conducted in December 2016 and January 2017. DJEI are working closely on this with other Departments and agencies, including DAFM, and are preparing short and medium term response plans.

The Secretary General referred to the success of the Agri Cashflow Loan scheme. DAFM will work closely with DJEI on financing options for food SMEs and larger companies.

J Sinnamon referred to the level of exposure of food companies to the UK market and stated that it will take time for companies and products to diversify.

Minister Creed concluded that access to affordable finance is a key response to currency volatility, uncertainty and the investment which will be required on several fronts to adapt to new market realities post-Brexit. He hoped that progress could be made quickly on these issues.

Item 3: Sustainability

Minister Creed stated that sustainability is one of the five themes of Food Wise 2025. It is at the core of the strategy with a range of specific recommendations aimed at managing the projected growth in a sustainable way, while protecting and improving the environment.

Sustainability is key to the Food Wise strategy, which states that: *"environmental protection and economic competitiveness are equal and complementary – one cannot be achieved at the expense of the other."* Food Wise enthusiastically supports technology and processes that result in a more efficient use of resources.

Ireland is one of the world's most efficient food producers in terms of carbon footprint per unit of output, with the joint lowest carbon footprint per unit in the EU for dairy production and joint fifth lowest for beef production. Through Origin Green and other initiatives, Ireland has systems in place to verify the sustainability credentials of our food exports.

Minister Creed referred to the important economic, environmental and social role that forestry makes to the Irish economy and an increasingly important role in rural development. He also

referred to the pivotal role afforestation will play in meeting our obligations under the EU Climate and Energy Framework to 2030.

There were six presentations: giving a comprehensive overview of the monitoring and analysis work being carried out in relation to the impact of the sector on the environment, and future plans.

1. Food Wise Environmental Sustainability Subgroup presentation (B Callanan)

This presentation covered the remit and role of this subgroup, the key messages of sequestration, biodiversity assessment & reporting, Teagasc MACC, water, agriculture & ammonia and plans for the year ahead including update on the sustainable pesticide use plan, nitrates review, updated Teagasc MACC, bioeconomy and 2017 as the year of Sustainable Grassland.

2. State of the Environment Report presentation (Matthew Crowe, EPA)

3. Teagasc presentation on ammonia and greenhouse gas emissions (Gary Lanigan)

4. Bord Bia presentation on sustainability (Jim O'Toole)

5. BIM presentation on sustainability (Donál Maguire)

6. National Dairy Sustainability Forum presentation (Joe Crockett).

Other attendees for this agenda item included: Andy Fanning, Dr Frank McGovern and Philip O'Brien (EPA), Trevor Donnellan (Teagasc), Alex Copland and Sinéad Cummins (BirdWatch Ireland), Jim Woulfe (Dairygold) and Conor Mulvihill (IDIA)

These presentations were followed by an open discussion.

S Cummins stated that for Ireland to achieve sustainability there must be a strong evidence base with detailed metrics behind the sustainability claims. This was echoed by A Copeland who stressed the need for best practice and to benchmark performance against international standards. He was supportive of the RDP and in particular the GLAS scheme. We need to look at the whole issue of biodiversity and there needs to be investment via research on this.

T McCarthy highlighted the journey Ireland is on and that we all collectively have the ambition to become the world leader in sustainability. She referred to the yearly Origin Green Sustainability Reports and that there is continuously piloting of new initiatives under Origin Green. Origin Green is subject to independent verification and audit.

B Callanan referred to the National Biodiversity plan. DAFM is working closely with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs on this. He referred to specifics under the GLAS scheme and to research been undertaken on biodiversity mapping.

G Boyle stated that biodiversity is the most challenging environmental factor. He agreed the need for tracking measures and monitoring sustainability and referred to the National Farm Study that tracks all dimensions and is linked to economy and farmer incomes. He stated that agriculture can play an important role in biodiversity and that we can learn from the Burren and Aran projects.

T Donnellan referred to the work Teagasc is doing on biodiversity and the collaborative approach with Bord Bia on preparing a biodiversity plan at a cost for farmers.

M Crowe stressed that evidence and research based is needed and is crucial. The EPA's State of the Environment Report has numerous stakeholders and shows comprehensive evidence based on environmental impact on where we are now. He suggested that the ESC should input into the National Mitigation Plan for Climate Change.

J Woulfe referred to the huge investment in the dairy sector and the marketing perspective associated with our image abroad. We need to differentiate ourselves from our competitors and we need to be proactive in sustainability.

The Secretary General stressed the key challenge with sustainability was a joined up approach by all and to increase the focus on sustainability and evidence based sustainability. He stressed that sustainability and competitiveness are equally important. DAFM, its agencies and the EPA have collected information on individual measures but are these joined up? There is a need to mine down on the different strands of data. We need to draw evidence based work together.

Minister concluded that collaboratively we should assist each other on the sustainability journey and learn from each other and work collaboratively to achieve the ambitious projections in Food Wise 2025 in a sustainable manner.

Minister thanked the NGO representatives, the speakers and others who attended for this issue.

4. Food Wise 2025 Sustainability Actions

A detailed report was circulated outlining Q4 2016 updates on the sustainability actions. There has been good progress to date.

5. AOB

(i) Date of the next meeting is 4 May and this meeting will cover the topics of Human Capital and the dairy sector.

(ii) National Women's Strategy

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform are preparing a new National Women's Strategy. The HLIC approved the addition of four new actions proposed by DAFM under Food Wise 2025 reflecting gender balance and improving the role of women in the agri-food sector.

Siobhán Dowling
Economics & Planning Division
13 March 2017