

Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting

Monday 25 January 2016, 7:30 pm, Seagoe Hotel

Chair: Elaine Shaw

Present: Keith Crawford, Peter Donnelly, Shane Donnelly, Ian Duff, Patricia Erwin, Thomas Gilpin, Kieran Hughes, Eric Long, Hamilton Loney, Roy Lyttle, Seamus McErlean, Robin McKee, Paul Mooney, Elaine Shaw, Patrick Taggart, Doug Thomson

Apologies: Barclay Bell, Elaine Chapman, Neil Cummings, Barbara Erwin, Jason Podris, John Shannon, Lyn Sherriff

1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

EU membership referendum

No members were in a position to confirm their organisation's position on continued EU membership.

Forum members to ascertain the position of their organisations on the question of continued EU membership before the next meeting.

Rural Development Programme update

Eric Long reported that there had been a good response to the opening of Business Development Groups from industry. Successful applicants will be notified soon.

Teleconference with farming unions

Patricia Erwin reported that the introduction of the National Living Wage was a major topic of the teleconference. The NFU's response to the National Living Wage can be read here: <http://www.nfuonline.com/news/latest-news/help-reduce-impact-of-living-wage-urges-nfu/>. Roy Lyttle and Doug Thomson confirmed that the National Living Wage remains a major concern in their respective sectors.

2. Horticulture industry statistical data

Seamus McErlean (DARD, Policy and Economics Division) gave a short presentation on DARD's horticultural statistics.

DARD estimated the output of production horticulture in Northern Ireland in 2014 to be over £76m. Output value for each sector is calculated as ((area x yield) –

wastage) x price. These terms are estimated from industry-supplied information, Agricultural Census data and, where necessary, industry handbooks (e.g. Nix).

Consultation from industry has allowed better estimates of output in the mushroom and apple sectors. With help from Forum members, Seamus hopes to make similar improvements in other sectors. His contact details are: email: seamus.mcerlean@dardni.gov.uk; tel: 02890524675; Twitter: @DARDstats.

3. Meeting with the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Members of the Forum (Elaine Shaw, Hamilton Loney and Shane Donnelly) and Pat Smith gave evidence to the ARD Committee on 10 November 2015.

The ARD Committee asked DARD to respond to the issues raised by the delegation from the Forum, which was done on 25 November. The letter was circulated to Forum members.

Although the Forum was pleased with how the delegation had represented the industry's concerns there was disappointment with the response from DARD. In particular, DARD's letter did not contain any help for dealing with the effects of the National Living Wage.

Doug Thomson was hopeful that the HTA would make representation on behalf of its members on the National Living Wage. The UFU Vegetable Committee will put the National Living Wage on its agenda for its next meeting.

4. Brochure for lobbying Assembly

Doug Thomson initiated a discussion of the HTA's brochure, "Supporting Horticulture in Scotland", which members had used to raise the profile of horticulture with the Scottish Parliament. There was agreement that the Forum should consider producing a similar brochure and organise an event in Parliament Buildings at which Forum members can lobby MLAs.

Patrick Taggart to ascertain how the Forum can gain permission to hold such an event.

5. Annual General Meeting

Elaine Shaw handed over to Ian Duff to chair the AGM.

a. Operational guidance

The current version of the Operational Guidance (dated November 2013) was accepted without amendment.

b. Bank account/payment of fees

Elaine Shaw reported that the bank account (First Trust) is close to being opened. The three signatories will be: Elaine Shaw, Keith Crawford and Barbara Erwin.

Elaine Shaw to complete process of opening account and liaise with Tim Hunniford about what to do about old (probably expired) unlodged cheques.

Once the account is open, participating organisations to contribute £125 annually, as specified in paragraph 9 of Operational Guidance.

Elaine Shaw to invoice UFU to facilitate payment of fee.

c. Election

As immediate past Chair, Elaine Shaw was retained as a Standing Member.

Organisations will be represented as follows:

Organisation	Representatives
Association of Landscape Contractors of Ireland	Keith Crawford Lyn Sherriff
Fruit Industry Federation	Graham Hewitt Sam MacNeice
GrowersNI	Doug Thomson
The Horticultural Trades Association	Neil Cummings John Shannon
NI Flowers and Foliage Association	Barclay Bell Barbara Erwin
NI Soft Fruit Growers Association	Peter Donnelly Mark Conway
Northway Mushrooms	Frank Donnelly
Ulster Farmers' Union	Hamilton Loney Roy Lyttle

The following members were co-opted:

Member	Sector	Proposer	Secunder
Shane Donnelly	Cut flowers and vegetables	Keith Crawford	Doug Thomson
Patricia Erwin	UFU Policy	Keith Crawford	Doug Thomson
Kieran Hughes	Mushrooms	Keith Crawford	Doug Thomson
Tim Hunniford	Top fruit	Keith Crawford	Doug Thomson
Robin McKee	Vegetables	Keith Crawford	Doug Thomson

Office bearers were elected as follows:

Office	Member	Proposer	Secunder
Chair	Keith Crawford	Doug Thomson	Elaine Shaw
Vice Chair	Barbara Erwin	Hamilton Loney	Doug Thomson
Treasurer	Elaine Shaw	Peter Donnelly	Keith Crawford

No one was elected to the office of PRO. There had been some discussion about using the services of Rodney Magowan, instead of a PRO, to write press articles and get them published. Ian Duff reported that Rodney would charge about £200 per article. Keith Crawford suggested that the Forum revisits the question of whether a PRO is needed at a later date.

The following invitees were agreed:

Invitee	Organisation
Elaine Chapman	DARD
Eric Long	CAFRE
Paul Mooney	CAFRE
Patrick Taggart	DARD

Keith Crawford and Doug Thomson to explore the possibility of representation by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of Ireland (or British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association), local authorities and the Institute of Horticulture on the Forum.

As new Chair, Keith Crawford thanked the outgoing Chair, Elaine Shaw, for all her hard work on behalf of the Forum. He committed himself to doing his best to represent all sectors and promoting the industry.

6. AOB

Update of Action Plan

Because of time constraints, Keith Crawford asked members to think of how the Action Plan should be updated.

Members to forward suggestions for the Action Plan to Patrick Taggart, in advance of the next meeting.

All Ireland Pollinator Plan

The Forum agreed to invite Melina Quinn (NIEA) to the next meeting to talk about the plan.

Patrick to invite Melina.

Chair's Report

Keith Crawford suggested that the Chair gives an annual report at the AGM. Members agreed.

Emails

Keith raised the problem of Patrick Taggart's emails sometimes going into the junk email folders of members.

Members to check whether Patrick's emails have gone into junk.

Farewell to Thomas Gilpin

Thomas announced his retirement from the Forum, because of health and business difficulties. He wished the Forum well who, in turn, thanked him for his work on the Forum's behalf and wished him well.

7. Date of next meeting

The following dates were agreed for future meetings: 14 March, 16 May and 28 June (this last date coinciding with Prize Day at Greenmount).

Members expressed a preference for continuing to meet on Monday evenings (but avoiding the first and last Mondays of each month) in the Portadown area. The March and May meetings will be held at the Seagoe Hotel, unless notified differently.

Patrick Taggart to arrange meetings.