



# Irish Deer Management Forum

## Fóram Bainistíochta Fianna na hÉireann

### Third Meeting MINUTES

2pm Tuesday, June 16th 2015

Venue: Knights Building, Ely Place, Dublin 2

**Chair:** Judith Annett.

#### **Attendance:**

Chris Fox	Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA)	Farming
Pat Hennessy	Irish Farmers Association (IFA)	Farming
Tom Short	Irish Farmers Association (IFA)	Farming
Sean Eustace	Wicklow Forest Owners Group	Forestry
Damian Hannigan	Wild Deer Association of Ireland	Hunting
John Fenton	Association of Game Shoot Operators (AGSO)	Hunting
Paddy Purser	Pro Silva Ireland/SIF/AIFC	Forestry
Barry Coad	Coillte	Forestry
Liam Nolan	Deer Alliance	Training
Jim Walsh	Individual	Research/Technical
Declan Little	Woodlands of Ireland	Conservation
Declan O'Neill	Wicklow Deer Management Partnership	Deer Management Group
Seamus Dunne	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Government Department
John O' Neill	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Government Department
James O' Keeffe	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Government Department
Wesley Atkinson	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Government Department
Tim Burkitt	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Government Department
Gerry Leckey	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Government Department

#### **1. Chair's Business**

The chair welcomed the group and outlined the agenda for the meeting. The Chair also outlined a recent visit to Co. Wicklow, where she visited some of the affected farms and met with farmers affected by TB in herds. The purpose of this visit was to provide a wider context to the issues.

With regard to the IDMF Action Plan the Chair raised the need for working groups operating on behalf of the forum, and outlined potential convenors that had been approached with a view to leading these groups.

At the time of the meeting two such groups had already been initialised, and a third group was preparing terms of reference. An invitation to serve within these groups was extended to all forum members. The Chair reiterated that she wished to see a cross-sectoral approach to the issues being addressed by these groups.

## **2. Apologies**

Sean Doris, NARGC

## **3. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the Second Meeting (May, 2015) were read to the forum and discussed. There was a discussion regarding Item 6 point 3 regarding the establishment of sub groups and the mandate for same. The chair expressed a view that such a mandate existed and that there was a desire for smaller meetings as an adjunct to main meetings. Such groups would be more productive.

A question regarding a mandate for these groups was put to the forum by the Chair. i.e. can the Forum carry on with a mandate for the groups as they exist at present. This was almost unanimously supported.

Following further brief discussion, the minutes were proposed, seconded and adopted.

## **4. Matters Arising**

Mr. Liam Nolan stated that he had received approval on behalf of the Deer Alliance to start work on a Deer Management Application. Such a development can be dovetailed to correspond with NPWS/IDMF or other requirements. He stated he would liaise with the Date Group in this regard. This development welcomed by the Forum and was noted as an action point arising.

## **3. Correspondence**

Correspondence was received by Mr. P Cullen from Co. Wicklow regarding the role of the IDMF in recent Media controversies related to deer, and highlighting his concerns regarding the lack of IDMF engagement on the issue. The Chair stated that the lack of current consensus within the IDMF limits media involvement and the contribution of the IDMF to such debates.

Further correspondence was received from Mr. Damien Hannigan, of the WDAI, in relation to perceived frustrations regarding the progress of the forum and the need for improved structure and best use of time. These points were addressed by the Chair, again highlighting the need for subgroups to enhance the workings of the forum.

## **4. Action Plan and Further Information:**

This item was dealt with comprehensively under Chairs Business.

## **5. DAFM North Wicklow TB study**

A number of short presentations followed regarding the recent DAFM TB study in North Co. Wicklow. Copies of these presentations are attached to these minutes as appendices.

Presentations:

- Calary Study Area – Farming Context and Impacts - Mr. Tom Short  
*Main points* – 2014 has seen very high levels in TB in Co. Wicklow from farmers persepective, and the impacts on farming can be severe. The costs of the current TB regime are in the region of €1,000,000 according to IFA. Farmers feel that deer are part of the problem.
- DAFM North Wicklow Deer TB Survey – Mr. James O Keeffe  
*Main Points* – 4 specific DEDS were sampled during the study, all of these had historic bTB issues. 1 DAFM hunter completed the work between October and January. The survey sites had tight links to reactor herds.

- Calary Deer Census Survey – Dr. Tim Burkitt  
*Main Points* – Population density estimates are a critical and integral element of deer management. Typically, deer densities are expressed in the number of deer per sq km or 100ha. The overall actual number is less important than the effective level of individuals per unit area. Indirect sampling techniques were used to establish population levels using the Faecal Standing Crop Technique. This involves randomly located marked linear transects. Methodologies for census work will differ between different types of land. Deer densities on Coillte land in the study area ranged between 12 and 32 units per 100ha.
- BTB in Deer – A wider view – Mr. Jim Walsh  
*Main Points* – Wild deer are end hosts for bTB and knowledge of deer biology and behaviour is crucial to understanding potential transmission pathways. Contact levels with farm animals including sharing of pastures etc. are central to epidemiology of BTB in both deer and cattle. Feed may be shared at key points of low grass production and feeding stress in Deer, and hence lower immune levels in affected animals arising from such stress. Infected feed material can then be ingested by both cattle and deer. A high bacterium dose is required to ingest infection and inhalation may provide a more direct route to infection. Reduction in stress levels in the herds, particularly via reduction in feeding stress may provide a management option.

### **Discussion**

A Discussion followed the presentations. It was generally agreed that the populations within the study area appear quite high, and higher than what most groups were prepared to accept. It was also suggested that it was very useful to hear the different perspectives concerned. A selection of points raised is presented below.

From an animal health perspective it was suggested that High TB rates are a function of high population levels and increased levels of stress in local deer herds arising from high populations.

Disease transmission risk is largely a function of the level or frequency of contact between host species, and the prevailing inoculum levels in affected areas.

Deer densities in the area concerned may be as much as twice the normal level.

There needs to be changes in practice across the spectrum, including feed hygiene protocols and protocols for the safe and hygienic disposal of offal and wastes arising from hunting that may carry infection.

A reduction in overall density offers a most direct option in reducing TB incidence in deer, and the potential for cross infection.

Vaccination of either deer or cattle is not an option, for a variety of practical reasons.

A coordinated approach similar to 2015/2016 is required. There should be a specific item for solutions or options in this regard on the next agenda.

A summer cull will be counterproductive to IDMF aims and objectives but support was expressed from the Deer alliance for a properly planned, organised and resourced cull during the 2015/2016 season.

Any proposal to reduce local deer populations must be qualified by a target population as an objective to aim for, and deer impacts must also be measured to ensure any actions are having the desired positive effect.

There was an acknowledgement of the work of the Ballinastoe Deer management Project and the work on data collection being carried out by Pady Purser on behalf of the group as a model for data collection.

There should be a repeat of the DAFM study in a few years to gauge the level of impact DM inputs will have on local deer TB rates.

The establishment of a Deer TB Group by IDMF is supported by IFA. Proposals for East Wicklow should be mirrored in West Wicklow where a similar problem exists.

#### **MAIN ACTION POINTS ARISING From Discussions**

1. The TB issue in North/East Wicklow is acknowledged by the Irish Deer Management Forum.
2. Similar issues may exist in other parts of the state.
3. The deer population in and around the study area should be reduced on deer welfare grounds to prevent further propagation and spread of bTB within deer herds in the area concerned.
4. This should be conducted during the normal legislative frameworks for season 2015/2016.
5. A TB Subgroup of the IDMF should be convened.
6. A press statement on the issue should be prepared by the Chair on behalf of the forum outlining measures to be taken and in support of these measures.

#### **6. Media/Public Relations**

Media issues were again discussed and it is intended to establish an IDMF website in due course. In the interim, DAFM/DAHG are providing space on departmental websites. Documents etc. can be found at

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests/forests-service/forests-service-general-information/deer-management/>

It was also proposed that a statement by the IDMF chair would issue at a point in the future where sufficient consensus exists to define such a statement on behalf of the forum.

#### **7. Members Update**

Damien Hannigan outlined a recent survey conducted by the Wild Deer Association and the findings of this survey. Copies of the survey results will be circulated to members directly.

#### **8. AOB**

No issues

#### **9. Next Meeting**

A date for the next meeting was not defined.