**TB Stakeholder Forum**

**Meeting 8**

**1st October 2020 @ 9.30am**

**Virtual On-Line Meeting**

**Minutes**

**Present:**

**Chairman and Ministers:** Michael Cronin Chairman, Charlie McConalogue Minister and Martin Heydon Minister of State.

**Organisations:** Mike Magan AHI, Joe Burke Bord Bia, Deborah Meghen Coillte, Conor Mulvihill Dairy Industry Ireland, Kevin Twomey Farm Technical representative, Lorcan McCabe ICMSA, Hugh Farrell ICSA, Sean Martin INHFA, Ray Doyle ICOS, Pat Farrell IFA, Thomas Duffy Macra na Feirme, Joe Ryan Meat Industry Ireland, Colin Kelly Ornua, John Mee Teagasc, Simon More UCD and Conor Geraghty Veterinary Ireland.

**Organisations Observers:** David Graham AHI, Paul Smyth ICMSA, Neassa Fitzgibbion ICSA, Tomas Burke IFA and Derry Dillon Macra Na Feirme.

**Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine:** Martin Blake CVO, Michael Sheahan DCVO, Eoin Ryan SSVI and Colm Forde PO.

**Bovine TB Forum Secretariat:** James O’Keeffe SVI, Philip Breslin SVI, Rosanne Greene AP, Donal Mooney HEO and Anthony Stringer EO.

**Apologies:** Padraic Fogarty, IWF, Gerry Leckey, NPWS.

1. **Chairman’s Opening Address:**

Chairman Michael Cronin welcomed all TB Forum representatives and gave a brief update. The Bovine TB Stakeholder Interim Report agreed on number of proposals. The Grant Thornton, On Farm Market Valuation Report has been completed and is for discussion at the next forum meeting. The Cost Benefit Analysis Report is due to be finalised this month.

1. **Minister Charlie McConalogue TD Address:**

The Minister thanked all Forum members for their commitment to date in developing proposals consistent with the ambition of eradication. He stressed the importance of stakeholders working in partnership to address rising disease levels. The Minister highlighted that the presence of TB in our national herd, albeit at a low level, gives rise to significant costs for farmers and taxpayers. It also increases administrative complexity and bureaucracy, and is a significant disadvantage when it comes to meeting certification specifications in export markets. He stated that if we want to reduce the burden on farmers, our objective has to be to eradicate the disease. The Minister noted that achieving eradication won’t be easy, but is possible provided all stakeholders are prepared to work together and take the necessary steps.

Minister McConalogue emphasised the importance of charting a way forward with renewed energy and urgency.  He committed to sharing a draft document with stakeholders within weeks and invited stakeholders to submit their views in writing or through bilateral meetings with DAFM officials. The Minister asked the Chairman to convene another meeting of the TB Stakeholder Forum in November once that process is completed, in order to agree a way forward.

1. **Minister of State Martin Heydon Address:**

Minister Heydon outlined how we all own the TB problem and we must do everything we can to contain this disease and eradicate it. He highlighted the significant impact a TB restriction can have at farm level so it is vital important that we maintain a positive momentum and agree a common way forward on how best to reduce TB levels.

1. **National TB Position Update on Disease and Finances by Colm Forde:**

See copy of presentation attached.



1. **Interim Report Proposals Review and Overview of Implementation Progress by Eoin Ryan:**

See copy of presentation attached.



1. **Round Table Update and Remarks from Stakeholders:**

Stakeholders noted that there is a need to tackle the TB Situation on a united front with all parties working together. All members of TB Forum were called upon to provide the necessary leadership in order to gain farmers’ trust in the TB Eradication Programme. It was stressed that DAFM and all stakeholders need to keep the lines of communication open with major policy changes discussed before implementation.

Several stakeholders noted the primary reason for the TB Programme and its primary benefit is access to trade markets thereby underpinning supporting farm incomes. Ireland’s TB Situation has a serious impact on our capacity to export live animals and products and on our access to the internal market.

Disappointment was expressed in some quarters regarding the issuing of the TB Herd History Risk Statement and Report (TBHHR) documents. DAFM acknowledged that some concerns had been raised and are willing to address these issues through the TB Forum.

Other areas of concern raised were the wildlife programme, financing of the TB programme overall and residual infection, management of reactor herds and providing adequate information to farmers to help keep clear herds free of TB. Issues arising as a result of Covid and recruitment to the veterinary profession were also highlighted.

Positives were noted in relation to local meetings between DAFM and farm organisations and the high impact TB programmes operating in certain counties.

It was acknowledged that science is a fundamental part of informing decision making and the science is clear that the Programme needs to be strengthened considerably if significant reduction of TB is to be achieved by 2030. Ireland can gain insight from other countries worldwide in terms of how they focused on risk and how farming organisations and industry provided leadership. Using a model similar to Animal Health Ireland was suggested.

1. **Next Steps**

A draft TB strategy document is to be circulated to members of the Forum. Comments may be submitted in writing or bilaterals may be requested in advance of the next Forum meeting.

A proposal that two technical working groups be established as part of TB Forum was supported. One group would be mandated to discuss the scientific elements of the programme while the second group would focus on financing.

The Chairman requested that all members of the Forum show due respect for each other when reporting through social or other media on the work of the Forum.

**Date of next meeting:** Early November 2020.