

Meeting of IFCI Steering Committee, 3rd March 2005, 10 Lower Camden St D2

Present: Declan Little (Soc C), Tony Mannion (WOC), Alistair Pfeifer (EC), Caroline Lewis (EnvC), Liam Lysaght (EnvC), Barbara Maguire (WOC), Ruth McGrath (EnvC).

Apologies: Donal Whelan (WOC)

Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising

Financial Report

At the end of December 2004 there remained €8487.48 in the IFCI Ltd. bank account; the situation was unchanged at the date of the current meeting.

It was noted that to date no invoices had been received from the solicitor, or the auditor.

It was asked if a proposal had been made to the Forest Service for funding for public consultation. The Chairman agreed to inform the Forest Service that an application would be on the way, but could not guarantee that an application would be made in advance of the closing date as he would be away for the next while and not back until the date had passed.

Correspondence

A letter of resignation had been received from David Tobin, as he had changed employment. Gratitude was expressed for the contribution David had made to the process.

A letter had also been received from Tony Mannion resigning as Director and Treasurer, but stating that he would remain on the Steering Committee. Tony was thanked for his thorough work on the accounts for the last few years, and it was noted that the books had been very well kept. It was noted that the co-signatories needed to be changed. Barbara agreed to provisionally consider the role of Treasurer.

Correspondence had been received from FSC with respect to attendance at the next FSC NI meeting to be held in Rome from 12-15 April. Ruth and Barbara agreed to consult their diaries with respect to this; matter.

A letter had also been received from Alistair Monument of FSC in relation to the accreditation of IFCI Ltd. FSC was happy to close off the outstanding preconditions and associated conditions, subject to minor amendments. However, FSC had raised the matter of the four chamber structure, and had indicated that this now was a hindrance to accreditation, and that "overwhelming support of all chambers" for the four chamber structure was required, and that he was not satisfied that this was the case. FSC have set a new precondition, that IFCI adopt a 3-chamber structure.

The Chair had discussed the letter and in particular the issue of chamber structure, and had outlined that the 4-chamber structure had been adopted by IFCI prior to the FSC ruling in 2001 essentially recommending that NIs adopt a 3-chamber structure. The issue had been discussed by the IFCI membership on several occasions before. The issues raised by FSC were discussed under Accreditation below.

Correspondence had been received from the Irish Forestry Contractors Association seeking urgent representation on the Steering Committee. The Secretary had replied outlining the election process that had taken place, and stated that the letter would be brought to the next Steering Committee meeting. It was agreed that the Secretary respond noting that IFCI is a membership organisation. Members had been asked for nominations, and IFCI would welcome active involvement as there are opportunities of direct involvement via the Economic Chamber, and the IFCA could go forward at the next AGM for election.

Accreditation Report

The committee was asked to read the letter from FSC in relation to accreditation and make their views known.

The Woodland Owners Chamber stated that they felt that FSC were changing the accreditation conditions to be met by the IFCI. They expressed frustration and anger that FSC were raising the bar at this late stage, and noted that FSC

had not requested this in writing as a condition for accreditation prior to this. They also felt that to change the chamber structure at this point would be disenfranchising people who came into the process on the basis that the representative structures were as they are currently structured. A case had been put forward at the start of the process, and at several meetings since, as to why the Woodland Owners felt a fourth chamber was necessary, and they felt this case still held. The Woodland Owners questioned whether economic interests had actually dominated the process and asked for evidence of this.

The Environmental Chamber stated that this issue had driven many environmental stakeholders away, and that it was one of the key issues for the Environmental Chamber in the process. The Environmental chamber said that there was a strong perception among stakeholders that there was an economic bias as a consequence of the existence of a Woodland Owners Chamber in addition to the Economic Chamber, which was crucial, as it had prevented participation from stakeholders. They noted that FSC stated that the four Chamber structure should have the "overwhelming support of all chambers", and that all four chambers did not support the four Chamber structure.

It was noted that IFCI was seeking accreditation and that FSC were in a position to set conditions. The Social Chamber commented that at the beginning when the structures had been put in place, many stakeholders did not fully understand FSC process, and also that the process has been a learning process. Though it is up to the membership to decide on whether or not to adopt a three-chamber structure, there is sufficient trust in the process to drop the fourth chamber. In any case, the process is doomed if a three chamber structure is not adopted as recommended by FSC as accreditation would not be forthcoming.

The Woodland Owners chamber proposed the holding of an EGM to put a proposal to the members in relation to the chamber structure.

The Environmental chamber noted that there might be a need to advise members that a vote to maintain the current structures could effectively collapse the process. The outcome will determine whether forest certification under the FSC process will continue.

It was discussed how the proposal should be put to an EGM. Does the Steering Committee make a recommendation as a committee, or do the different chambers take their individual positions? It was acknowledged that a meeting would allow individual SC views to be discussed, allow members to hear directly from FSC, and to also allow members to express their own views. The Woodland Owners stated that they would need to revert to their constituent organisations, and could not say what their recommendation would be.

It was agreed that a common Steering Committee position would not be possible.

It was agreed that there would be a need to hold two EGMs on the day. The first would be to put the proposal to the members on the 3-Chamber Structure. If this motion were to be adopted, another EGM would be required to make the necessary amendments to the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

There was a discussion as to whether this would seem to present a *fait accompli*, and seem to assume that the first motion would be adopted. However, it was ultimately agreed that there was in fact no assumption as to the outcome, and the alternative would be to bring members to a second EGM to vote on the changes to the Memorandum and Articles of Association, should the first motion carry, and that it was less disruptive to propose both EGMs for the same day.

A proposal would need to be drafted, and the relevant clauses for amendment would need to be identified in the Memorandum and Articles of Association, and the relevant documentation assembled and posted with 21 days notice. The Secretary will undertake this task.

The Chairman agreed to draft a proposal to put as a motion to the members at an EGM, and to email this to the Secretary.

It was agreed that the twelve person Steering Committee would remain in place until next AGM, although the voting structure may change.

It was suggested that the Chair discuss the matter with Donal Whelan (WOC) and brief him on outcome of meeting

with respect to the letter from FSC.

It was agreed to write to all members with a renewal form, including those who did not renew membership last year, as some may wish to rejoin to vote given the nature of the EGM motion.

The Steering Committee collectively refuted the claim reported in the correspondence from FSC that Coillte had undue influence on the process. It was pointed out that Coillte had only one representative on the Steering Committee. All chambers were unanimous on this issue.

The Chairman undertook to draft a response to FSC based on comments from the Steering Committee. This would state that an EGM would be held to put a 3-chamber motion to the members but would note that further new conditions could not be accepted. The IFCI needed to establish the final conditions for accreditation for the process to continue.

Directorship and Officers of the SC

Declan Little reported that the Woodlands of Ireland SC now wished that he step down as Chairman, as he had filled this role for a number of years. However he will remain as a Social Chamber representative on the Steering Committee. This opened a debate on the position of Chairperson, as it was acknowledged that Declan had taken on a very difficult role. The possibility of an independent chair had been discussed in the past, but had never been possible due to lack of funds. It was agreed to reconsider this, although it was acknowledged that if this person required payment this might not be possible due to very limited funds. The Committee agreed to consider possible suggestions for the position of Chairman between now and next meeting. Declan was thanked for his considerable work as Chairman during a difficult process and will remain as interim Chair in the short term.

The Steering Committee agreed to suggest names for an independent chair within the next week, to be sent to the Secretary.

The matter of a Director from each chamber was raised, and it was asked why there was not one Director from each chamber at present. This was discussed and it was felt to be connected to the issue of allegations made against IFCI, as this has deterred some from becoming Directors. It was pointed out that there was nothing preventing anyone who wanted to be a Director from becoming a Director. On the matter of allegations made against IFCI, the Secretary reported a conversation with the ODCE, which stated that the ODCE had concluded its investigations and IFCI was not under investigation.

Declan Little agreed to go forward as a Director from the Social Chamber, and Caroline Lewis agreed to go forward from the Environmental Chamber as a Director.

Ruth McGrath indicated that she did not really have the time at present to fulfil the role of Company Secretary due to new lecturing commitments, and this would not change until the academic year ended. Ruth was asked if she could continue for the present, and agreed to continue as secretary although noted that she had very limited time and could not act as a contact point for information on FSC in general.

Draft Standard.

It was suggested that the draft standard be put back to the TWG for issues to be discussed. Principle 10 needed discussion as was it not completed at last Steering Committee meeting.

It was agreed that although the matter of Chamber structure needed to be dealt with as soon as possible, that the Draft Standard should not be overlooked, and must be completed before the next AGM. The TWG will meet as soon as possible after the EGM.

AOB

It was agreed that the membership fee would remain at €5. This was proposed by Caroline Lewis and seconded by Declan Little.