

Minutes of the 2018 Annual General Meeting of Irish Wildbird Conservancy (Cairde Éanlaith Éireann) hereinafter referred to as BirdWatch Ireland or BWI.

Location: Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise, Co. Laois – 16^h June 2018 – 14:00

Board members present: Gerry Lyons (Chairperson), Catherine Casey, Jim Fitzharris and John Lynch.

Also present: Declan O'Sullivan (Interim CEO)

Apologies from Board members: Tony Culley, Jim Dowdall, Breffni Martin and Stephen Wilson
Apologies from staff members: Anita Donaghy, Niall Hatch.

There were also 14 other members of BWI present.

The meeting commenced at 14:00 with the Chairperson welcoming members. The Chairperson introduced the Board and staff members Alain Gatel, Mark Robins, Brian Caffrey, Oonagh Duggan and Darren Ellis.

1. Minutes of AGM 2017

The Chairperson afforded the members present the opportunity to review the minutes of the 2017 AGM noting that they have been available on the BWI website and on request as advertised in the Spring 2018 issue of Wings number 88.

The minutes had been approved by the Board at its meeting on 21st February 2018 and were now deemed duly considered.

2. Annual Report of the Board 2017

The Interim CEO, Declan O'Sullivan, presented the report of the Board for 2017. The Board had met 10 times since the 2017 AGM.

It had been a positive and eventful year for BWI, with the key features being as follows:-

- Her Royal Highness Princess Takamodo of Japan had visited Ireland in June 2017 and BWI had facilitated a very successful trip to Lambay and Rockabill for her.
- The financial situation in BWI had been stabilised.
- There had been major system upgrades in the area of data security.
- DOS acknowledged the contribution made by the Board to the running of the organisation.
- As always, the staff had made a significant contribution to the successful operation of BWI and he wanted to thank the staff for their effort which went well above and beyond the call of duty.
- Two staff members had appeared before the Oireachtas Environment Committee and had been complimented by many commentators for their performances.
- Olivia Crowe had left BWI after many years' outstanding service and was sincerely thanked on behalf of all members.
- Declan O'Sullivan welcomed Mark Robins, the new Head of Conservation & Policy.
- A volunteering programme had started at the East Coast Nature Reserve and this was progressing well. The work done by these and other volunteers was a major benefit to BWI.

Mark Robins then addressed the meeting. He was clearly new to the organisation having started in January 2018. He pointed out that the Annual Report gave an excellent review of the various conservation and policy issues addressed by BWI, including the management of its many reserves and the extensive range of projects undertaken.

A number of members present asked questions and expressed various points of view. The ensuing discussion can be classified under two broad headings: (i) membership and (ii) other issues.

The salient points emerging from this section of the meeting with appropriate Board responses were as follows:-

Membership Questions

Concern was expressed at the static level of BWI membership.

- The Board was acutely aware of this. BWI was good at attracting members but less effective with retaining them.
- The Board was aware that many e-zine subscribers were not members.
- www.birdwatchirelandconnect.ie had been set up to get extra income.
- There were definite plans in place to revamp the website and overhaul the membership renewal system.

Branches were frustrated at not being able to get accurate up-to-date local membership lists.

- A new membership system would enable BWI to share this information with Branches, subject to GDPR compliance.
- It would be very useful to get members' email addresses to seek permission to use data under GDPR, etc.

It would be helpful to have a BWI membership card – as the RSPB has for its members.

- It was suggested that a sub-committee involving two or three branches could look into this.

BWI needs to make more local connections - schools, IFA, ICMSA, IFA.

- Some of this could be done at national level but most would be best done at branch level.

Other suggestions for boosting membership included tracking visitors to the ECNR, contacts with local authorities and tourism bodies, and regular birdwatching conferences.

The overall tenor of this part of the discussion was the urgent need for a new membership system and extra initiatives to foster membership growth.

Other Questions

The question was asked as to whether the visit if HRH Princess Takamodo conferred any financial benefit.

- This was a “slow burner” and had subsequently facilitated a high-level interface with Government Ministers and senior civil servants.

The issue of the conservation of Corncrakes on Inisbofin was raised.

- It was pointed out that this was the responsibility of the NPWS as BWI did not have anyone on the ground there.

The Annual Report was deemed to be duly reviewed.

3. Consideration of the Annual Accounts 2017.

The Chairperson presented the financial statements for BWI for the year ended 31 December 2017 together with the reports of the directors and statutory auditors thereon (“Annual Accounts”). The P&L showed a modest but welcome surplus of €21,883.

Several technical queries on the Annual Accounts were raised and dealt with by the Chairperson.

The Annual Accounts and were now deemed duly considered.

4. Remuneration of auditors.

The Chairperson called for a proposal to authorise the Board to approve the remuneration of the statutory auditors.

This was duly proposed and seconded.

5. Election of Board Members.

With the retirements of Tony Culley and Jim Dowdall there were two vacancies on the Board.

A nomination had been received in respect of Andrew McMillan, Wicklow. As the number of candidates was less than the number of vacancies, he was declared elected.

The Chairperson welcomed Andrew to the Board and thanked the outgoing Board members for their service to BWI over the years.

6. Reports from the Branches.

A total of 15 Branches submitted reports and these are available on the website.

7. Any Other Business.

Oonagh Duggan thanked all the branch members for their help and advocacy on the Heritage Bill. A number of Senators had commented on the excellent input from BWI members.

A query was raised on public liability insurance.

- The Chairperson agreed to check out the level of cover for non-members and also the position on outings, especially those involving boats.

The poor attendance at the AGM was commented upon. It was not on Facebook nor was it listed under events on the BWI website.

- It was agreed that, in future, the AGM would be better publicised.

The members present thanked the Board all their work during the year.

There being no further business the Chairperson thanked the members present and the meeting concluded.

Signed: _____

Date: _____