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The Facilitators

Dr. Pat Bogue
Dr. Pat Bogue is the Managing Director of Broadmore Research & Consulting which was established in 2005. He graduated in 1993 with an Honours degree in Agricultural Science from UCD and subsequently undertook a Masters in Agriculture (Rural Development). Following a number of years working with Macra na Feirme as Agricultural Policy Officer, Pat engaged in a Doctorate research programme on dairy farms in Co. Clare. This project proposed a series of policy proposals for the development of small-scale dairy farms which were subsequently implemented by Government.

He spent a period working in Community Development providing policy support to community projects in Limerick (City and County), Tipperary and Clare – assisting disadvantaged communities to voice their opinions and represent their issues. He was recruited to lead a joint UCD/Teagasc research project focused on developing and monitoring the impact of a new farm-family advisory programme.

Broadmore Research and Consulting is based in Ennis, Co. Clare but engages with clients nationwide. The company operates in a range of sectors including: agricultural; education; research; advisory; community/voluntary; business; and sports. The company has successfully delivered projects on behalf of Government Departments, local authorities, educational institutions and the wider agricultural industry (advisory, farm organisations, media, financial, industry). As part of this freelance consultancy work, Pat was part of the delivery team for the National Rural Network (NRN) as part of the Rural Development Programme (2007-2013). In addition he lectures on an occasional basis on rural and community development in NUIG. He is currently engaged in a European Erasmus agricultural research project with Limerick Institute of Technology.

Ciaran Lynch
Ciaran Lynch is the Managing Director of Community Engagement Partners Limited having retired as the Development Manager of LIT in 2016. He has a background in sociology, town planning, rural development and governance. He worked as a local authority planner for over 20 years and was the Planning and Development Officer for County Clare for 13 years. He was formerly the Head of the Sustainable Rural Development Department at Tipperary Institute and subsequently the Development Manager of LIT.

He is a former Director of the National Rural Network and was a member of the CEDRA Expert Advisory Group. He has also been Chair of the Tipperary Energy Agency, of the North Tipperary Sports Partnership and the LIT Research and Development Subcommittee, as well as a member of the County Tipperary Economic SPC. He is still a member of the Tipperary LECP Steering Committee and of the Boards of the South Tipperary Volunteer Centre, Kilkee Waterworld, the North Tipperary Green Enterprise Centre and Communities Creating Jobs.

In addition to his work in local authorities and higher education he has worked on many development projects including local and regional social and economic strategies, community planning projects, Interreg, Erasmus and Horizon 2020 projects, the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Mid-West Regional Authority and on issues of organisational development and governance for national and community-based organisations including ICOS and Muintri na Tire. He has also presented papers and given presentations at many national and international conferences over the years.
National President's Foreword

A Chairde,

They say it’s not a plan unless it’s written down, and as the world around us goes through one of the largest times of change in recent history there is little doubt that Macra na Feirme needs a plan. The strategic plan that is contained here is a reflection of the wants and needs of both the members but also the organisation as a whole and it is now up to us, the members, to work as a team to bring it to fruition and to make the most of the opportunity presented to us.

As the world around it changes, every organisation must adapt to remain relevant, but the members have clearly told us how important it is that we maintain our core values of personal development, education and social interaction in particular for young farmers but also for all those with a rural connection.

I want to acknowledge the very valuable input of our external stakeholders made up of sponsors, government departments, funding partners such as Department of Children & Youth Affairs, Skillnet and many others. Your insight is appreciated and hopefully you can see it reflected in our strategy.

Yours in Macra,
James Healy
Macra na Feirme President 2017 -2019

National President's Foreword

Following extensive consultation with Macra na Feirme members and a wide variety of stakeholders, I’m delighted to present the Macra na Feirme strategic plan for 2017 - 2024, compiled by Dr Pat Bogue and Mr Ciaran Lynch.

Every National President has a number of priorities and objectives, which they set out to achieve during their two year term of office. Two such priorities for me, were the completion of a full review and the development of a strategic plan for our organisation. I am proud to say, that with the help and support of our members, these objectives had been met, during my term as the 35th National President.

The full operational and organisational review, was completed by Mr Jack Keyes and presented in April 2016. This Keyes' report looked at the day to day running of Macra na Feirme. This report is currently being implemented and plays a crucial role in enabling the fulfilment of our strategic plan. Our strategic plan sets out the vision, mission, values, goals, direction and objectives of the organisation over the next 7 years.

There will be many opportunities and challenges ahead for Macra na Feirme during this time. Full implementation of the goals and actions set out in our strategy, will equip our organisation with the resilience and resources necessary to meet such opportunities and indeed challenges, to deliver for our members.

I would like to acknowledge the work of our strategic planning committee, all our members both past and present, individuals, government departments, funding partners, sponsors and organisations who contributed to the development of our strategic plan.

I look forward to seeing Macra na Feirme continue to develop and evolve through the implementation of our strategic plan over the coming years.

Seán Finan,
Macra na Feirme National President 2015 - 2017,
Chairman of National Strategic Planning Committee
Chief Executive Introduction

I am pleased to introduce “Rurally Active, Engaging & Transforming” Macra na Feirme’s Strategic Plan 2017-2023. Against a backdrop of significant change within the voluntary sector, highlighted focus on governance & budgetary restrictions which impact on youth work delivery and member services, Macra na Feirme has responded by developing our first ever broad based consultative Strategic Plan to guide the organisation through these and other challenges.

The creation of a strategic plan is a significant undertaking for any organisation, as it clarifies its mission, vision and values. It also sets targets and indicates what must be done to achieve them. Having a strong and robust plan is all the more important when the organisation is undergoing a transformation. In our case, much of this transformation is shaped by the external environment through charity regulation and codes of governance for non-profit organisations. At times like these, it is crucial that an organisation knows what it intends to do and how to do it, but also that it communicates this with others. With these in mind, we are pleased to introduce the first Macra na Feirme Strategic Plan developed through consultation with members, industry and stakeholders, to cover the period 2017-2023.

This plan is the start of an exciting journey for Macra an Feirme, with the ultimate ambition of significantly growing our rurally active membership and continuing Macra na Feirme’s rich legacy of community engagement and transforming the lives of young people involved in the organisation.

Macra na Feirme has underpinned the development of rural communities since it’s foundation in 1944. Today, the services provided to members such as committee skills, event organisation public speaking, planning and budgeting, and leadership in the community continue to form the bedrock for Macra na Feirme into the future.

With this Strategic Plan (2017-2023) our ambition for the future remains clear – we intend to grow and develop membership in our organisation across rural Ireland providing valuable services and social outlets for members in rural Ireland.

The contribution of National Council, National Executive, Strategic Plan Steering Group, External stakeholders, sponsors, funding departments, staff, National President (2015-17) Sean Finan and National President (2017-19) James Healy has given this strategic plan a focus and vision that will enable Macra na Feirme to grow and support members in rural Ireland for years to come. A sincere thank you to the Dr. Pat Bogue and Ciaran Lynch for the enthusiasm and engagement they have shown in supporting Macra na Feirme develop this strategy. This combined effort and commitment ensures that we will continue to achieve our ambitious goals into the future. It is appropriate that we acknowledge and express our gratitude to the many stakeholders who have so generously gave of their time and energy in contributing to the development of this strategy.
Background

Macra na Feirme is the representative organisation for Ireland’s Young Farmers and Rural young people aged between 17 and 35 years old. The organisation is a registered charity that represents and supports the growth and personal development of its members through six thematic areas of activity – Agriculture, Public Speaking, Sports, Travel, Performing Arts and Community.

We represent the views of over 9,000 members in almost 200 clubs all over Ireland. Macra na Feirme clubs are organised into 31 county/regional executives covering the twenty-six counties of Ireland with Cork divided into five regions and Tipperary into two regions.

We provide a comprehensive range of advice, information and training programmes for young farmers and young people primarily based in rural communities through our Macra na Feirme Skillnets Programme. Additionally, we undertake advocacy with policy makers, legislators and funders on behalf of our membership to secure an appropriate political, legal and operational environment for young farmers in Ireland and Europe. We are well respected and very active advocates on behalf of young farmers with European policy makers in our own right and through our membership of CEJA, the European Council of Young Farmers.

Macra na Feirme was founded in 1944 and during its lifetime the organisation has had a significant impact on Irish agriculture. Macra na Feirme was to the fore in co-founding many other national farming organisations such as the Irish Farmers Association (IFA); IFAC Accountants; Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA); The Irish Farmers Journal; Foroige; and National Coop of Farm Relief Services (FRS Network), and more recently The Land Mobility Service.

In 2016 Macra na Feirme completed an operational and organisational review of the organisation. This review focussed on the current activities of the organisation and will form a building block for a strategic plan. Arising from that Operational and Organisational Review Macra na Feirme engaged a consultative process with members and stakeholders to develop our first consultative multi-year strategic plan.
Strategic Planning Process and Consultation

This strategy was developed using a consultative process facilitated by the external facilitators. A large number of surveys and consultations were carried out as part of the process. These included:

a. Meetings and Workshops:
   1. Four regional consultation workshops for members;
   2. Two meetings with the Steering Group;
   3. Two meetings with National Council and County Officers;
   4. One meeting with National Council on its own;
   5. Two meetings with staff;
   6. Six face-to-face meetings with key external stakeholders; and
   7. Ten telephone meetings with external stakeholders.

b. On-line Surveys:
   1. One members’ questionnaire which also targeted past members and non-members;
   2. One patrons’ questionnaire;
   3. One club officer questionnaire; and
   4. One external stakeholder questionnaire.

c. Other meetings:
   The facilitators also participated in a number of other meetings with ad hoc committees and with relevant individuals.

The facilitators also consulted a number of other relevant documents and frameworks which were relevant to the future development of Macra na Feirme. These included:

- The recently completed Keyes Organisational Review Report
- The existing Macra na Feirme Strategy
- The National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work (NQSF)
- The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020
- The Macra na Feirme Constitution

The consultation sought stakeholders’ views on a variety of matters including the role of Macra na Feirme; the benefits felt by members; the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; the things which worked well in the organisation and what didn’t work so well; the risks the organisation faced; and the perception of the organisation from outside.

All this information was used by the facilitators to construct an understanding of how the members and others viewed the organisation, what the organisation wished to achieve and the challenges to that achievement. This understanding was then used to develop the mission, visions, values, goals, objectives and strategic actions of this strategy.
Overview of the Strategy

The principal elements of the strategy are as follows –

- **Mission Statement**
  This refers to the unique purpose of the organisation and its target groups.

- **Societal and Organisation Visions**
  These refer to the outcomes that the organisation would wish to see both for rural Ireland and for itself.

- **Values**
  These are the fundamental ways in which the organisation believes it and its members and staff should behave and are the principles which guide how it does its work.

- **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges**
  These related to the mission, vision and values. Something is a strength or a weakness only in a certain context; and indeed, there are characteristics which can be both a strength and a weakness.

- **Risk Analysis**
  All organisations face risks and it is important that these are considered as part of the strategic review and planning exercise. Some risks are generated internally but the most difficult risks to address are those which arise from external circumstances. It is not possible to exist in a risk-free world but it is possible to take steps to minimise the danger of the risks arising and to mitigate their impact if they do. These steps are reflected in the strategic goals, objectives and strategic actions.

- **Strategic Goals**
  Strategic goals are related to the mission statement and the vision. They are the achievements which define the vision the attainment of which would mean that the vision was being achieved and the mission accomplished.

- **Strategic Objectives**
  The strategic objectives are the more detailed elements which need to be achieved if the strategic goals are to be reached. They are the pre-conditions to the achievement of the goals or the factors which will help the goals to be accomplished.

- **Strategic Actions**
  This is not an action plan. However, some strategic actions are required in order to commence the achievement of the objectives which is the first step on the road to the wished-for outcomes.

- **Proofing Against Keyes Report**
  The Keyes Organisation Review Report which was commissioned by the organisation in 2016 contained many relevant recommendations and insights. It is important that, as far as possible, these recommendations and the strategy are in alignment. This Strategy was proofed against the Keyes Report recommendations.

- **Implementation**
  - **Initiating the implementation**
    This short section indicates how the implementation of the strategy will be commenced.
  - **Monitoring, evaluation and review**
    Monitoring, evaluation and review are built-in to the strategic approach of this strategy as a prudent way of assessing the achievement of the organisation and of responding in a timely fashion when issues arise.
Background Information

The consultation and information-gathering process provided a significant insight into the internal and external views of Macra na Feirme. The internal assessment was from the ground up, involving members at all levels up to National Council and the Presidential team. In addition the views of staff and external stakeholders were sought. The membership of Macra na Feirme tends to be involved in more than one rural organisation which can be considered as both positive (they are willing to engage in organisations for their own and the wider community benefit) and negative (competition for the time and commitment of members). However, on balance, it demonstrates an interest amongst members in their own communities.

The reasons for members joining Macra na Feirme are wide and varied but social activities and interaction with other young people are the most recurrent themes. Interaction with other young people (through competitions, club events/activities, social events, policy development) keeps people involved. The core functions of Macra na Feirme were identified by members as relating to social interaction and representation of young farmer and agricultural issues. Social interaction is perceived as being much more than meeting people but also as addressing isolation, providing peer support and a connection for members within their communities. A key outcome of membership is personal development through the opportunities to engage in teamwork, organise events and activities, participate in communities, represent the organisation, engage in training and take on roles and responsibilities within the organisation. A further but often underestimated function of Macra na Feirme is that of community involvement which is exemplified by Macra na Feirme clubs engaging in specific charity fundraising events/activities for the benefit of other organisations and causes.

While there is a significant level of engagement among members with Macra na Feirme activities, challenges remain in terms of encouraging all members to get actively involved and participate in the wide range of events and activities which are organised for them. A further challenge at club level is the recruitment of new members and the retention of existing members. While the organisation is perceived as having a lot to offer young people, pressures on time and a lack of clarity and awareness of what Macra na Feirme has to offer are potentially limiting the size of the overall membership. Providing clarity about what the organisation has to offer is difficult because Macra na Feirme means many different things to different people.

The organisation was also seen as serving local communities through active engagement in those communities. Staff and past members (with goodwill for the organisation) were also identified as being key groups for Macra na Feirme while the critical role of sponsors/funders/patrons all of whom have specific needs, requirements and expectations was also identified. One further important challenge that was noted by members was that of funding. While the organisation has a stable core funding base, it was generally acknowledged that this base had to be protected and widened where possible. Consultations with external stakeholders (funders, sponsors, key organisations and the agri-industry) provided some key insights into the perception of Macra na Feirme outside the confines of the organisation. It was recognised and respected by external stakeholders for both its policy development/representation role and for its social role particularly in the context of reducing rural isolation. The organisation was seen as serving the needs of young people in general and having an important development role for members.
In addition to Macra na Feirme meaning many different things to different people, it also seeks to serve a wide range of target groups including members, potential members and others in the community and industry. The consultation with members identified different target groups but one suggestion was that the organisation’s target group should include all young people between 17 and 35 years both farming and non-farming. This provides a wide pool of potential members for the organisation but there is a considerable and recognised challenge in attracting and serving both those directly involved in farming and those not directly involved in farming.

Some key external stakeholders also, however, referred to the changing governance, legal and administrative requirements facing organisations such as Macra na Feirme and the critical importance of the organisation responding to these increasing demands through addressing its own governance and management systems.

It is recognised that it will be challenging for the organisation to meet the diverse needs of the membership and the expectations of funders at the same time. These challenges are by no means insurmountable but they will require dedicated and consistent attention and clarity within the organisation about who it serves, what it does and how it does it.
Mission Statement

The following is the mission statement of Macra na Feirme. It incorporates the overall purpose of the organisation, it identifies the key work which it undertakes and it refers to its key target groups which are designated as ‘young people who have a rural connection including young farmers’ which is designed to specifically note the organisation’s role with regard to young farmers while emphasising its overall role in respect of all young people with a rural connection – both farmers and non-farmers.

The mission of Macra na Feirme is to contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities in Ireland by supporting the social, economic, cultural, personal development and well-being of young people who have a rural connection including young farmers, by representing their interests in the development and implementation of relevant policies, programs and services at national, regional and local levels and by advocating on their behalf.
Vision Statements for Rural Ireland and Macra na Feirme

The vision of any organisation is closely related to its mission. The vision is divided into two parts – one for the organisation and one for the communities it serves – in this case Ireland’s rural communities.

The vision refers to the place where an organisation wishes things to get to in the longer term and it acts as a kind of guiding star for an organisation’s activities. Ideally, all activities being considered by an organisation should be assessed on the basis of the extent to which they are consistent and will help the organisation’s vision to be attained.

Having regard to the mission of Macra na Feirme as set out above, the outcome of the consultation and the nature and purpose of visions, the following is the vision of Macra na Feirme for the areas it serves.

The vision of Macra na Feirme for rural Ireland is to have rural and agricultural communities which are active and vibrant socially, economically and culturally, in which young people including young farmers play an active and recognised role and which are attractive and nurturing places in which to live and work.

Having regard to the same set of considerations the following is the vision of Macra na Feirme for the organisation itself –

The vision for Macra na Feirme is of a member-led organisation which is recognised by young people, decision-makers and society in general as a key resource for rural young people including young farmers and as their authentic voice; which provides a sense of belonging to an extensive and committed membership; and which is actively supported in fulfilling its mission by both the state and civil society.

Organisational Values

Values are judgements about what is right and wrong and organisational values are those approaches which an organisation holds to be fundamental to the ways in which it carries out its work. Organisational values are those beliefs held so strongly that they drive people’s behaviour and how people interact with and treat each other. Organisation values should influence the work of the organisation and how it treats its stakeholders as well as how its members and employees treat each other and how it treats the environment, other organisations and so on.

If a value is useful, appropriate behaviours which reflect it should be capable of being defined. This is almost more important than the definition of the values themselves. It is not possible to monitor the extent to which values are being adhered to. However, when expected behaviours are aligned to the values, they can both be supported and monitored and, over time, help create a culture which becomes internalised by the organisation’s members. When this occurs the values become an inherent part of the way that the organisation works and is seen to work. At that point the need to impose the values becomes very limited.

Having regard to the consultations carried out as part of the process of developing this strategy and to the mission and visions set out above the following are the values which are espoused by Macra na Feirme and which will guide how it carries out its work. These are expressed in terms of the values themselves and the types of behaviour which would be expected to be associated with them.
• **Respect** for all, internally and externally, as well as for the built and natural environments. This value would be expected to be reflected in the ways in which: volunteers engage with each other; volunteers and staff engage together; staff engage with each other; and the organisation engages with those external to its membership. Respect does not amount to absence of disagreement but to the way in which this disagreement is expressed and managed. Respect implies that the other is treated courteously and that disagreements are addressed in a non-personal way with the focus on the issue rather than the person. It also includes the concept of listening to what the other has to say in an open way and in encouraging those who are shy to have their say. Respect for the environment would be reflected in the way that the organisation considers the impact of its activities on the environment, seeks to minimise that impact and to mitigate it where possible. This might be actioned in the minimisation of waste, the use of environmentally friendly materials and the minimisation of travel for example.

• **Transparency** both internal and external for all its activities including how it handles its financial matters, how decisions are made and how its activities are run. Transparency should be positively pursued rather than being allowed to happen or not happen by default.

• **Commitment** to the organisation and its functions and activities. This value would be reflected in the ways that members in particular would be willing to give of their time to the organisation and to seek to achieve its aims and objectives. It would be reflected in levels of attendance at organisation activities, in following through on undertakings given and in being willing to undertake a leadership role within the organisation.

• **Inclusion** in its remit of all young people with a connection to rural Ireland. This is an important value and is reflected in the feedback from the member consultations. As the nature of Irish society in general and Irish rural society in particular has started to change, the homogeneity which once applied in all rural communities has started to alter somewhat. If Macra na Feirme is to be representative of all Irish rural youth it is important that it proactively seeks to be inclusive of all. Inclusion also relates to the way in which all members have an opportunity to be involved in the organisation’s decision-making. Mechanisms to facilitate this need to be put in place although the structure of the organisation does facilitate it in principle but it must be balanced with the capacity of the organisation to be responsive and to address issues in a timely and efficient manner.

• **Service** to the communities in which it is based. Service is a long-standing Macra na Feirme value and activity and this again came through in the member consultations as one of the strengths of the organisation. It is important that this value is retained and developed within Macra na Feirme. Service can be provided in many ways but as an underlying value guiding the activities of the clubs in particular it can be extremely powerful.

• **Integrity** in the manner in which it pursues all its activities. Integrity refers to honesty and having a set of guiding principles to which the organisation and its various parts adhere. The values and principles set out in this document can provide that moral framework which Macra na Feirme can use to assess the way in which it is working.

• **Excellence** and Innovation in the service it provides to its members and to the wider community. Macra na Feirme exists in a competitive world. There is competition for members, competition for attention and competition for resources. Macra na Feirme’s effectiveness in competing for all of these will be enhanced by the quality of its activities. Macra na Feirme is a voluntary organisation and must absolutely remain so. However, it needs to be a voluntary organisation which is professionally run and in which excellence is sought in all that it does and in which new ways of doing things are embraced when required.
• **Comradeship** amongst all its members in whatever part of the organisation they are engaged. Comradeship is a core component of an organisation like Macra na Feirme. The social benefits of Macra na Feirme membership came through strongly in the consultations and this social engagement is well reflected in the concept of comradeship. Comradeship is reflected in the respect that members have for each other, in the support which they provide for each other, in the honesty which they share and even in how they run their activities.

• **Volunteering** and volunteerism as fundamental principles for the organisation. Volunteering and volunteerism are at the heart of the Macra na Feirme model and organisation. This came through in many of the processes which were engaged in the course of the development of this strategy. Volunteerism does not, however, mean lack of structure, low standards or lack of a commitment to quality. Good volunteering requires significant work and how the organisation’s volunteers are recruited, supported and recognised are important elements in the success of any voluntary organisation.

• **Democratic** decision-making within the organisation. Macra na Feirme is a voluntary organisation led by the members and for the members. Democratic decision-making at all levels of the organisation is an important value for Macra na Feirme. However, democratic decision-making must also be effective. Democracy can often be best served through the use of the democratic processes for strategic matters and by allowing others to implement the actions required to achieve the democratically agreed goals and outcomes. This is the way in which many forms of Government operate.

• **Collaboration** with other like-minded organisations and individuals as a way of working. Macra na Feirme is a long-established and reputable organisation. It has the capacity to pursue many actions from within its own resources. However, it recognises that its impact can be enhanced when it collaborates with other like-minded organisations to achieve mutually agreed goals.
Summary of Macra na Feirme Strengths, Opportunities, Risks and Challenges

The identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges was considered at many of the consultation meetings. This kind of analysis provides guidance to any organisation as to how its strategic goals and objectives should be set. These should seek to enhance and benefit from the strengths of the organisation, respond to the opportunities which are available, strengthen the areas where weaknesses are identified and identify ways of responding to challenges.

Principal Strengths and Opportunities

1. The organisation has a substantial and widely-distributed membership.
2. The role of the organisation in addressing both policy issues and practical challenges faced by young farmers and rural youth is acknowledged and understood as is its role in developing rural leaders of the future.
3. There is significant goodwill towards the organisation amongst some key decision-makers and organisations.
4. It is seen as being a positive and responsive organisation and to address issues when requested.
5. There are opportunities for the organisation to enhance its presence in a variety of contexts.
6. The organisation has a large and influential past membership which provides it with an opportunity to enhance its visibility in key areas.
7. The organisation has a solid governance base on which to build in order to meet existing and emerging challenges in this area.
8. The organisation has opportunities to seek funding from sources it has not approached in the past.

Risks and Challenges

1. The need to respond to the new funding regime which is emerging within one of its principal state funders.
2. The need to appeal both to farmers and non-farmers alike in a way which does not alienate either group.
3. The need to enhance the social/meeting others function of Macra na Feirme while maintaining true to its developmental and community-orientated principles.
4. The need to broaden the financial base of the organisation but in a way which does not limit its appeal to its current agri-based funders.
5. The need to establish a structure and system of governance which reflects the changing legal and administrative demands of funders and of society in general but which still maintains the member-centred nature of the organisation.
6. The need to become a youth-work organisation with regard to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the NQSF for Youth-Work while serving a membership older than that focused on by these bodies and being a body that is engaged in advocacy and policy development also.
7. The need to grow and develop within the confines of a challenging budgetary envelope.
8. The need to articulate a youth-work message with regard to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the NQSF for Youth-Work while conscious of a membership that includes youth up to 35 years and being a body is engaged in advocacy and policy development also.
9. The need to enhance communication, understanding and clarity within the organisation and its processes.
It is clear from both internal and external consultations that, while Macra na Feirme does, indeed, have strengths it also faces significant risks and challenges. Some of these can be readily addressed in that the solutions to them are relatively clear. Others are more complex and will require significant thought, engagement and action in order for them to be successfully dealt with.

All parts of the organisation – membership, leadership and staff - will need to be actively involved in meeting these challenges. This will require change in how Macra na Feirme carries out and manages its activities. It is not intended, however, that the fundamental ethos or purpose of the organisation change. If anything these are of greater importance and more needed than ever in changing times.

It is recognised that change is not easy; it is also recognised that change will take time. This strategy has a seven-year time horizon and does, therefore, contain a significant number of strategic actions. Not all these can be or will be undertaken at once but there are priority actions that need to be taken now in order to address risks and challenges which are more immediate than others.
Strategic Goals

The strategic goals for the organisation follow from the mission and vision and from a consideration of the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and risks which the organisation faces. The goals of the organisation are aimed at fulfilling the mission, achieving the vision, capitalising on the strengths and opportunities and guarding against the risks and weaknesses.

The following are the Goals of Macra na Feirme.

**Goal 1**
To establish significant, diverse and stable funding bases at national and club levels which assist in the achievement of the organisation’s strategic goals.

**Goal 2**
To increase active membership throughout the country, including in those areas where the membership has been low historically and in those target groups which have been hard to reach.

**Goal 3**
To increase the level of engagement of members with the activities of the organisation at all levels and to provide support to agreed organisation initiatives.

**Goal 4**
To provide services and supports to young farmers which are related to the needs which they themselves have identified.

**Goal 5**
To establish a system of Governance which is efficient, effective and responsive; which allows Macra na Feirme to actively participate in policy development across a range of relevant issues at national, regional and local levels; which complies with existing and emerging legal and administrative requirements; and which allows the effective management of organisational risk.

**Goal 6**
To generate an enhanced profile amongst the general public so that Macra na Feirme is recognised as the authentic voice of rural youth, including young farmers, and is thereby more attractive to potential members.

**Goal 7**
To generate an enhanced profile amongst decision-makers so that it is seen as a body to be automatically consulted and respected on matters relating to rural youth, young farmers and the rural community in general.

**Goal 8**
To create an organisational structure in which the role of each of its parts is clear to all and fit for current purpose and in which communication between all its parts is regular, clear and consistent.

**Goal 9**
To create an organisation in which the roles of volunteers and staff are more clearly defined and in which mutual respect is enhanced as a result of that clarity.

**Goal 10**
To develop a strong, positive base of past members and of others committed to the development of rural areas which supports the organisation financially and otherwise and which assists it in achieving its goals.

**Goal 11**
To comply with the processes and activities of the NQSF for Youth Work and other requirements of funders and regulatory bodies.
Strategic Objectives

These strategic objectives are based on the strategic goals outlined above. They reflect where appropriate what emerged from the various consultation processes and have been cast in more general terms as is appropriate to their purpose. It should be noted that some of the stated goals may already be part of existing Macra na Feirme strategy and that others may be wholly or partially under way.

Goal 1 and Associated Objectives

To establish significant, diverse and stable funding bases at national and club levels which assist in the achievement of the organisation’s strategic goals.

1. Recruit appropriate expertise for all finance-related committees of Macra na Feirme.
2. Re-establish a fund-raising committee including appropriate external expertise.
3. Develop a clear fund-raising strategy and action plan which seeks to identify potential sources of funding outside the traditional Macra na Feirme sector in addition to those which currently provide support.
4. Review the contribution of members to the resources of the organisation with a view to deciding whether that percentage contribution should change and, if so, how.
5. Engage with state funders in a proactive way to promote the Macra na Feirme case for added funding over and above that which is provided for its youth-work activities.
6. Provide a consistent framework for fundraising by the organisation to assist in enhancing the quality of fund-raising activities at all levels.
7. Engage with potential partners to access EU funding through Erasmus+, Horizon2020 and similar funding programs.
8. Maximise the potential of targeted funding sources such as Skillnets.

Goal 2 and Associated Objectives

To increase active membership throughout the country, including in those areas where the membership has been low historically and in those target groups which have been hard to reach.

1. Focus on the retention of members as well as recruitment in order to ensure that those who have developed leadership skills and capacity remain in place.
2. Highlight more the social element of Macra na Feirme in the way that the organisation is presented.
3. Develop a clear, contemporary message regarding the benefits to the individual of Macra na Feirme club membership.
4. Have available an up-to-date promotional model and associated promotional material for Macra na Feirme clubs which can be used to give a consistent message about the organisation at local and county levels as well as at national level and which is designed to improve the perception of Macra na Feirme.
5. Develop enhanced promotional skills at all levels of the organisation based on a clear statement of necessary knowledge and skills.
6. Engage with other youth organisations to provide a pathway to membership from them into Macra na Feirme.
7. Engage pro-actively with other farming organisations to seek their assistance in presenting the benefits of Macra na Feirme membership to their own younger members.
8. Engage pro-actively with other farming organisations to seek their assistance in presenting the benefits of Macra na Feirme membership to their own younger members and in identifying pathways for Macra na Feirme members into leadership roles in those organisations.
9. Engage pro-actively with other rural and sporting organisations to seek their assistance in presenting the benefits of Macra na Feirme membership to their members and in identifying pathways for Macra na Feirme members into leadership roles in those organisations.
10. Specifically target all those entering and considering entering farming to become active members.

11. Have a clear strategy for clubs relating to the recruitment and retention of volunteers including clear volunteer management mechanisms.

12. Use the resources of Macra na Feirme clubs to assist each other in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

**Goal 3 and Associated Objectives**

To increase the level of engagement of members with the activities of the organisation at all levels and to provide support to agreed organisation initiatives.

1. Identify the barriers to engagement which may exist at member level and address these barriers when they are identified.

2. Identify the support which is sought by members at club level to enhance participation.

3. Have in place a suite of Macra na Feirme club activities which form the basis of Club engagement which are contemporary and attractive to the current generation of members.

**Goal 4 and Associated Objectives**

To provide services and supports to young farmers which are related to the needs which they themselves have identified.

1. Identify the services and support needs of young farmers through a pro-active engagement with them.

2. Provide, where possible, the services and supports which have been identified.

3. Put in place a research strategy which identifies the information needs required for high-quality and persuasive policy development and promote this research agenda with research institutes and funders alike.

4. Seek collaborative funding opportunities for research and development projects related to young farmers with appropriate organisations.

**Goal 5 and Associated Objectives**

To establish a system of Governance which is efficient, effective and responsive; which allows Macra na Feirme to actively participate in policy development across a range of relevant issues at national, regional and local levels; which complies with existing and emerging legal and administrative requirements; and which allows the effective management of organisational risk.

1. Review the legal status of the organisation, including its clubs, and determine the most appropriate corporate status to adopt in the light of emerging legal and administrative demands, having due regard to the membership nature of the organisation and to the need to protect those who undertake responsibilities within the organisation from action being taken against them in a personal capacity. Specifically consider forming Macra na Feirme into a Company Limited by Guarantee with all members of the organisation being members of the company.

2. Have in place a system of governance which meets the requirements of the DCYA regarding size of oversight body, skills required, number of external members and independence.

3. Identify the key skills required within the different parts of the organisational structure and provide mechanisms through which these skills can be acquired including officer training, staff training and co-option of members of committees and councils with specific skills from outside the Macra na Feirme membership where necessary.

4. Have in place job-descriptions of all officers and other representatives within the organisation which reflect the legal responsibilities of the positions as well as their representational and other roles.
Goal 6 and Associated Objectives
To generate an enhanced profile for the organisation amongst the general public so that it is recognised as the authentic voice of rural youth, including young farmers, and is more attractive to potential members.

1. Have an integrated approach to promotion at national, regional and local levels to enhance the profile of Macra na Feirme which delivers the appropriate message about Macra na Feirme to different parts of its stakeholder profile.
2. Participate, where possible, in national, regional and local representative organisations and seek to have a place on all such bodies where Macra na Feirme has an interest.
3. Identify and avail of the external resources available at national, regional and local level to support the work of the organisation.
4. Engage directly with local media on a regular basis at county level and provide reports and media content to websites and publications.
5. Support staff in developing the necessary skills in this area in order that they are in a position to provide advice and guidance to members regarding this engagement.
6. Enhance support to and the level of activity of the Rural Youth Committee in order to increase the public awareness of Macra na Feirme’s role in this area and to facilitate it in being active in relevant policy development.

Goal 7 and Associated Objectives
To generate an enhanced profile amongst decision-makers so that Macra na Feirme is seen as a body to be automatically consulted and respected on matters relating to rural youth, young farmers and the rural community in general.

1. Make submissions to all relevant processes associated with rural areas, farming and young people at national, regional and local levels.
2. Consider the presentation of Macra na Feirme as an organisation with three key pillars – agriculture, youth work and community development - all in the context of rural areas.
3. Engage on a regular face-to-face basis with decision-makers at national, regional and local levels.
4. Request to be included on committees and other consultative and decision-making bodies which address matters to do with farming, rural areas or young people at national, regional and local level.
5. Provide training to members to enable them to participate effectively in policy and decision-making organisations.
6. Engage pro-actively and regularly with the media at national and county levels to present the Macra na Feirme case to the public at large.
7. Proactively engage with past members of Macra na Feirme who are in positions of authority or influence, so that they can promote the importance of the role and functions of the organisation in appropriate contexts.
8. Provide support and resources to all policy-making structures within the organisation to enable them to respond appropriately to policy-making and submission opportunities.

Goal 9 and Associated Objectives
To create an organisation in which the roles of volunteers and staff are more clearly defined and in which mutual respect is enhanced as a result of that clarity.

1. Create a culture in which there is reasonable expectation of staff amongst volunteers and vice versa.
2. Establish through a participative process and disseminate to all members protocols for staff/volunteer communication including appropriate lines of communication, expected response from staff and volunteers as appropriate, expected response times, procedure in the event of a response not being possible, appropriate means of communication and dispute resolution.
3. Create a mechanism to facilitate informal staff/volunteer engagement with a view to assisting the Chief Executive in addressing any general issues arising between staff and volunteers.
4. Regularly review the quality of the interaction between staff and volunteers and address any issues which emerge from such review.

Goal 10 and Associated Objectives
To develop a strong, positive base of past members and of others committed to the development of rural areas which supports the organisation financially and otherwise and which assists it in achieving its goals.
1. Create a programme of activities which former members of Macra na Feirme and others committed to the development of rural areas would be in a position to carry out for the organisation on a structured basis.
2. Have in place a range of mechanisms through which contact can be maintained with key past members of the organisation.

Goal 11 and Associated Objectives
To comply with the processes and activities of the NQSF for Youth Work and other requirements of funders and regulatory bodies.
1. Have in place appropriate mechanisms and systems for addressing NQSF requirements on an ongoing basis and appoint a staff member with overall responsibility for this process.
2. Have in place systems for meeting the requirements of the Charities Regulator and review the implementation of these systems on an ongoing basis.
3. Be a subscriber to the Governance Code or similar standard and review performance against this standard on a regular basis.
4. Have in place a protocol for Clubs to assist them in complying with all regulatory requirements both local and national.
5. Regularly review internal process risks and identify changes required.
Strategic Actions
The following is a list of strategic actions which will be undertaken to commence the achievement of the goals and objectives set out above. It will be noted that many of these actions involve reviews of current structures and practice but it is considered that such reviews are necessary if appropriate changes are to be identified. Some of these steps and activities are already in hand or contemplated, the inclusion of an action here does not imply that it is necessarily not already under way.

The strategic actions have been grouped and the headings indicate the principal strategic focus of the intended actions though specific actions may be relevant to more than one strategic area.

**Increasing membership and membership engagement**

1. Develop mechanisms for incorporating a conscious social element into all Macra na Feirme activities.
2. Establish regional recruitment teams to engage directly with organisations responsible for community development/social inclusion to seek their assistance in establishing new clubs in low activity areas.
3. Establish a structured mentoring system through which experienced members of successful clubs can act as advisors to clubs which are newly-established or are in difficulty.
4. Review and evaluate the competitions both centrally organised and locally organised in terms of the level of participation and the contribution to the profile and image of the organisation.
5. Carry out one national consultation per year on matters impacting on young farmers and rural youth.
6. Develop a multi-annual Skillnet-related strategy which, through a system of integrated, progressive training, seeks to achieve identified outcomes for participants as well as responding to their expressed needs and which seeks to enhance the training networks which are developed through this process.
7. Develop and implement a targeted leadership development program in consultation with other relevant organisations.

**Improving governance and organisation structure**

8. Establish a Governance review group comprising Macra na Feirme members and expert external members to develop a new Governance model for Macra na Feirme within a set time-frame.
9. Carry out an expert-assisted review of the current constitution.
10. Review and revise if necessary the terms of reference of all structures in the organisation.
11. Review the job descriptions of all officers and representatives and amend as necessary.
12. Review the organisation with a view to providing a staff management structure to support the CEO with regard to strategic planning and direction of staff.
13. Appoint an Internal Audit Committee and carry out a phased audit in accordance with a planned scheme over a number of years. Respond with system changes to any Internal Audit findings.
14. Prepare rolling two to three year action plans at national and county levels with targets and indicators and monitor, update and review on a regular basis.
15. Establish a risk register and review on a regular basis.
16. Include linkages to the NQSF Principles and Standards in all action plans.
17. Review the skills needs of staff and provide training where identified as being necessary.
Enhancing the profile of Macra na Feirme

18. Put in place a promotional strategy which includes action at national, regional and local levels to enhance the profile of Macra na Feirme.
19. Develop a standard suite of promotional material and advocate its use at all levels of the organisation and retire any older and out of date material. This promotional material will include material which is specifically targeted at key parts of the organisation’s stakeholders to emphasise Macra na Feirme’s role in those areas.
20. Generate an enhanced social media presence at all levels of the organisation including at club level and consider establishing a position of Social Media Officer in all clubs and counties as well as at national level.
21. Develop a series of promotional social media materials such as YouTube videos for use at national, regional and local levels.

Improving the financial situation

22. Carry out a review of the organisation’s financial needs and of the relative contribution to the organisation’s finances by each of its parts.
23. Carry out a review of potential external sources of funding and other resources available at national, regional and local level to support the work of the organisation and of how these resources might be accessed.
24. Re-establish the fundraising committee, review its terms of reference and composition and provide for the inclusion of specific external expertise.
25. Develop and implement a common fundraising protocol for national, regional/county and club levels.
26. Develop a protocol for proactively engaging with industry funders/other potential funders which clearly demonstrates what benefits there are to funders from providing support to Macra na Feirme.

Developing the resource of past members and others committed to rural development

27. Develop an exit interview protocol for use with departing members (where possible) and seek the members’ commitment to identified activities at the exit interview.
28. Develop a protocol for identifying and inviting key people committed to the development of rural Ireland to assist Macra na Feirme with its activities.
29. Hold an annual past-members event for all those who have assisted Macra na Feirme during the previous year.
30. Create a tracking tool for past members to identify their career progress and communicate with them as career milestones are reached.

Enhancing engagement with policy-making at all levels

31. Develop national policy guidance for all representatives to facilitate their participation in decision-making processes at local and regional level and in representative organisations and to facilitate a consistent message being delivered on behalf of Macra na Feirme.
32. Following consultation with the membership, develop a suite of key policies regarding agriculture, rural youth, youth in general and rural communities which can be easily tailored as a Macra na Feirme submission when an opportunity to make submissions at national, local or regional level arises.
Enhancing the integration between staff and volunteer activity

33. Provide appropriate induction training to all officers and representatives of the organisation at all levels having regard to their responsibilities within the emerging legal and administrative environments and review the nature and effectiveness of this training on a regular basis.

34. Provide appropriate on-going skills training for all county and club officers tailored to each county on the basis of a Training Needs Analysis facilitated for that county by the assigned Training and Development Officer.

35. Review the expectations which volunteers have of staff and vice-versa and develop statements of reasonable expectation.

36. Carry out an annual review of the quality of the interaction between staff and volunteers and address any issues which emerge from such review.

Keyes Report Proofing

The Keyes Organisation Review Report was a major organisational and operational review carried out during 2015 & early 2016 by Jack Keyes, retired Chief Executive of Cavan County Council and presented in April 2016. While the focus of the report was different to that of the present report, it did address many of the same issues. In the consultations which were undertaken it also identified many of the issues which arose during the course of the preparation of this strategy. The Keyes Report recommendations for actions are more specific in many cases than those identified in this strategy. However, there is significant consistency between the perspectives and recommendations of the two reports. The Keyes Report, however, due to the detailed nature of its recommendations, will be a critical foundation for putting in place the mechanisms required to ensure the effective implementation of this strategy over the next seven years.

Implementation

A strategy is a map for the future which identifies the goals and objectives of the organisation but in order to achieve the outcomes identified in the strategy actions will have to be taken. Action plans will, therefore, be prepared with the intention of achieving the outcomes set out in the strategy. The action plans will be produced on a rolling basis with a two to three year time horizon and will contain targets and indicators which are related to the goals and objectives contained in the strategy. A Draft Action Plan will be prepared by the Staff under the direction of the Chief Executive and endorsed by the National Council. The National Executive will be the principal oversight body for the implementation of the strategy and the Chief Executive (and other staff where appropriate) will report to the National Council and National Executive on the basis of the outcomes envisaged in this strategy and in the rolling action plans.

A number of strategic actions are included in this strategy. These actions are of three kinds –

1. Critical actions which are either required by law, required by the policy imperatives of key external stakeholders or fundamental to the future well-being of the organisation. Those regarding governance, finance and recruitment and retention of members fall into this category.
2. Low-resource actions which can be taken at an early stage and which require changes in the way things are done rather than major financial investment. Reviews of the organisational structure, communication protocols and job descriptions are amongst the things which fall into this area.
3. Resource-requiring actions which may need to await the generation of additional general resources or resources targeted at their implementation before they are put into effect. Additional training, some reviews which would require external assistance and the development of new promotional materials may fall into this category. The strategic actions which fall into categories 1 and 2 will be proceeded with immediately and steps will be taken to identify targeted resources for Category 3 actions.
**Initial implementation steps**

In order for this strategy to be effective its implementation will require the active support of all parts of the organisation. In order to provide leadership in implementation as well as continuity the following steps will be taken –

1. A Strategy Implementation Steering Group will be established to guide the initial stages of the strategy’s implementation. This group will include the President, the Vice-Presidents, the Immediate Past President (for continuity), the National Officers and the Chief Executive.

2. A list of priority strategic actions will be identified by this group and these actions adopted as the initial implementation plan. Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of specific actions will be devolved to specific individuals. The initial implementation plan will be reviewed every six months and additional actions included as other actions are completed or progressed.

3. A report on the progress being made on implementation will be presented to each National Executive and National Council meeting and the steps for addressing any difficulties will be included.

4. A report on the progress being made will also be presented by the Chief Executive to staff meetings and plans for addressing difficulties discussed.

**Monitoring, Evaluation and Review**

Monitoring, evaluation and review are critical to the successful implementation of any plan or programme. Monitoring refers to the measurement of pre-determined indicators, evaluation refers to the assessment of the implications of the data produced by the monitoring and review refers to the consideration of changes to the plan or programme that is suggested by the monitoring and evaluation.

These processes can take place at a number of levels:

- The monitoring of inputs or actions;
- The monitoring of outputs or achievements; and Different targets and indicator types will be considered.
- The monitoring of outcomes or impacts which refers to the extent to which actions, policies and programmes are effective in achieving the changes intended.

**Targets and Indicators**

Monitoring of implementation of the strategy and guidelines will be supported by setting targets and indicators. Targets are precise quantitative achievements that are sought while indicators are proxy measures of the extent to which goals or objectives are being met. There are many types of targets and indicators but two of the most important in this context are end-state targets and indicators and trend targets and indicators. ‘End-state’ refers to the final desired situation it is wished to achieve; ‘trend’ refers to the direction of change and the speed at which progress is expected to be made in achieving the end-state.

Since indicators are proxy measures of achievement, care will be taken to ensure that there is a clear rationale as to why the measure is being used and confidence in it is a good proxy for the goal or objective involved. The mere availability of data will not be used as the basis for deciding on its suitability.
Input Targets and Indicators
These refer to the extent that the actions that are outlined in the plan have been implemented. These types of targets and indicators are usually the most easily measured as they are under the direct control of the organisation and are most easily tracked.

Output Targets and Indicators
These refer to the extent to which the inputs generate the immediate responses desired. This might refer, for example to an increase in the retention or recruitment rates of members, the generation of additional finance or more reference to the organisation in the media.

Output targets and indicators are also generally capable of being measured and of being linked to the specific actions being undertaken, though this may require the putting in place of specific systems of measurement to capture the relevant data.

Outcome Targets and Indicators
These refer to the extent to which the overall impacts intended by actions, plans and programmes are being achieved. Plans and programmes always have high level intentions and would refer to the increase in the health of rural communities and the prosperity of young farmers or the reduction in the degree of isolation amongst rural youth.

These targets and indicators can also be measured; however, it is much more difficult to link impacts and trends in this area to specific actions. There are so many factors that impact on the high-level outcomes that it is normally impossible to make a direct link. All that can be assessed is whether the overall effect of plans and programmes is being effective.

While the measurement of outcomes is of great importance and can alert us to areas where intervention needs to be prioritised, the direct linking of actions and outcomes is extremely difficult.

Review of Macra na Feirme and its Strategy
The achievements of Macra na Feirme will be reviewed on a regular, though not unduly frequent basis. There will be a different time-frame for measuring inputs, outputs and outcomes. This is partly to do with the time that needs to be permitted to elapse between actions and outcomes, and partly to the availability of the different types of data for monitoring and evaluation.

The review process will help point towards matters that may need to be changed although unduly quick responses in the context of long-term issues will be avoided.
Conclusion

This strategy is intended to guide the strategic approach of Macra na Feirme for the next seven years. It has been prepared following extensive consultation both internally and externally. It is challenging and sets difficult targets for the organisation to achieve during that period. It sets out a clear mission and vision for the organisation, identifies the values which will guide its work and some key strategic tasks which need to be undertaken.

This strategy will be a living document. Its goals, objectives and values will be used by the organisation to assess its progress at a strategic level. It will be used to assess the extent to which Macra na Feirme is seen as a key provider of services to young people and those in rural areas in particular. It will also be used as the framework within which the organisation and its constituent elements will develop and implement annual action plans and all proposed activities will be proofed in the context of their contribution to the achievement of the goals and objectives set out in the strategy.

While this document sets a strategic direction for Macra na Feirme for the next seven years it is acknowledged that much may change over that period. While it is anticipated that the goals of the organisation will not vary much, the strategy will, however, be regularly reviewed to take account of changing realities in rural Ireland and within the public funding sector, the demands of governance and regulation and the challenges
The Macra na Feirme Young Farmer Skillnet is funded by members and The Training Networks Programme, an initiative of Skillnets Ltd., funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Education and Skills.