

UFI plant recommissioned at Killybegs

The official relaunch of the United Fish Industries fish meal and oil plant at Killybegs, following a €30m refurbishment and upgrading, was performed by Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Mr Michael Creed TD, on his first visit to Killybegs as a member of Government. The factory, the only one in Ireland, continued processing throughout the two-year rebuild.

The event was attended by representatives of all sectors in the fishing industry as well as other local businesses and elected representatives. Members of the board of directors of the Norwegian-based Pelagia Group, of which the Killybegs plant is a member, were also present.

Minister Creed said the plant was a critical piece of infrastructure for the industry in that it served the whole island.

He paid tribute to UFI Managing Director, Mr Frank Trearty, and his team. "I mean, €30m is a very significant cheque to write on any given occasion and I think it is a significant statement about the Irish seafood industry and I would like to salute you, if I could also, the board of Pelagia for their commitment", Mr Creed said.



Minister Creed cutting the ribbon at the relaunch.

The Minister said that the ambition of the fishing industry was outlined in an overarching "Food Harvest 2025", which had significant ambition for growth and expansion, adding value and creating additional employment.

One of the avenues where that could be seen happening in terms of the seafood industry was in moving up the value-added chain. And, as they did that, critical pieces of infrastructure, like the UFI plant in Killybegs, were

enormously important.

The Minister said he had visited the plant back in 2008, when he was an Opposition spokesperson for Agriculture and the Marine.

It was an amazing achievement to have delivered such an amazing technical and engineering feat as this €30m redevelopment but especially to do so whilst remaining in production.

"I'd like to salute Frank and all of his team for that and to the workforce, who continued to provide a very critical piece of infrastructure. I shudder to think what would happen if we hadn't been in a position to keep the operation ongoing whilst embarked on the expansion project", Minister Creed said.

The upgraded plant fitted very comfortably with the ambition that they had in the Department for the seafood industry and he hoped that Pelagia might see further investment opportunities for investment in Ireland.

The fishing industry was generally located in peripheral communities and that was why the employment directly created was of great value and appreciated as well as the number of employees that were supported in related industries; in IT and transport, engineering and, of course, in the fishing industry itself, Mr Creed said.

Introducing the Minister, UFI General Manager, Frank Trearty, said that the redevelopment of the

Killybegs plant took significant planning as, essentially, the old factory was demolished and a new one rebuilt during two phases, while the plant still took in raw materials and provided a service to the fishing industry.

"It was an amazing achievement to have delivered such an amazing technical and engineering feat as this €30m redevelopment but especially to do so whilst remaining in production."

"The flexibility and ingenuity of our staff in the plant and wider group were central to this successful process", he said. He added that sourcing the most efficient and reliable equipment was key to the redevelopment to create processing and engineering systems that will be highly energy efficient with lower CO2 emissions.

"We have installed the most up to date systems in the plant and redesigned the look of the old plant into a truly modern facility enhancing the reputation of Killybegs as Ireland's premier fishing port. The look and feel of the plant has been radically transformed with the removal of old silos and tanks creating a modern plant on entry and exit to Killybegs", Mr Trearty said.

The Board of the Pelagia Group flew



New look factory floor.

in from Norway for the opening and members of this board who signed off on the multi million investment include some of the global leaders in Salmon farming and fish processing. The Board expressed their thanks to suppliers, staff, regulators and local people who had supported the Killybegs business.

Speaking at the opening, COO of Pelagia Feed, Arnt Ove Hoddevik said that, of the 26 facilities of the Pelagia Group, UFI Killybegs was located in a key and central position in the group's holdings on the western seaboard of Europe.

“The investment is an indicator of the Group's continuing commitment to Ireland and the growth of its Feed Division”, he added.

“Originally built in 1957, the plant has been central to the fish processing industry of Killybegs and over the years has made some notable advances in processing as they where the first to investigate the processing of Boarfish as an emerging raw material in 2005”, Mr Hoddevik said.

The plant employs 36 people and during the redevelopment and rebuild over 200 people were employed on site.

PELAGIA INVESTMENT

The decision to invest €30m in upgrading the fishmeal plant at Killybegs was not taken lightly by the board of Norwegian parent group, Pelagia, according to Egil Magne Haugstad, CEO of Pelagia Feed.

Speaking at the launch of the rebuilt plant, Mr Haugstad said: “It is important to know that, in its own right, the decision by the board to invest here in Killybegs was not an easy one.

He added: “We took the decision that Killybegs was strategically the best location to be in Ireland was the best location to be, due to its closeness to fishing grounds and had many resources, including human resources, but in particular also, closeness to the grounds of blue whiting which are enormous and have good potential for the future.”

And he held out the prospect of further investment and development: “It might be in the future that we see additional ways of creating value and you can all be sure that when we think time and technology and market is ready, Pelagia will



George Gallagher, well known around the Irish coast for many years as a representative of Bridport-Gundry Nets, Killybegs, pictured at the official opening of the rebuilt United Fish Industries plant by Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Mr Michael Creed TD.

In 1957, at a time when fishing was in a depressed condition, George took a construction job, building the original fishmeal plant in Killybegs.

“After it was built, I worked there for the first two owners before going back to

fishing”, he recalls.

George was invited to attend the opening of the new €30m plant when UFI General Manager, Mr Frank Trearty, heard of his involvement with the project at the start.

contribute to do so.

“However, at this factory, we prove that we do the basic skills and that we can create a market for that. Further development will, eventually, take place.”

Killybegs 'strategically the best location' - Pelagia boss

But he stressed that future growth would depend on good relationships with the industry and the community in Killybegs: “We need co-operation with all of you. We need co-operation with all businesses in Killybegs, in Ireland, so we can create together the right values and the right development. We cannot do this alone. Only by being the best customer to the suppliers and the best partner to the society can we achieve our long-term goals”, Mr Haugstad said.

“I hope this factory will prove

through its operations in the years to come, as it has done in the past, to be one of the pillars of the Irish fishing industry and the development in Ireland”, he added.

Recalling that the original fishmeal plant at Killybegs was built in 1957, Mr Haugstad said: “The renewed factory we are opening today has long roots in the Irish fishing industry; it has roots back in the 1950s.

“We should know that however long the roots, it's not an old-fashioned industry. The method being used here is probably the best and most well-known method of sustaining values from trimmings and seafood not suitable for direct human consumption.

“At this factory we are part of the value chain. Everything that goes into the factory is turned into food and, some way or another, everything is part of what is going into the food chain.

“UFI Killybegs is a part of the world's biggest pelagic company, Pelagia. We are a proud partner with all of you developing Ireland's fishing industry. Only through best practice, co-operation and innovation can be contribute to Ireland being a front runner in the industry.

“I guess we Norwegians didn't go to Ireland so friendly 1,000 years ago. But today I hope we will be considered to be friendly and we come here with respect. The challenge for us is to create a higher value by delivering sustainable, responsible traceability and high quality final products to our market and, of course, return a high value to the raw material suppliers.

“We are proud that Pelagia, as it evolves, has the resources and the courage and the initiative and are able to innovate and fulfil strategic investments like this factory with a budget of €30m”, Haugstad said.



The UFI Team.