

DAFM Response to Midlands Eastern Regional Assembly

Ireland is one of the least forested countries in the EU with forest cover at just 11% or 770,020 hectares (National Forest Inventory, NFI, 2017¹) compared to the EU average of 43%². Over half (50.8%) of forests are in public ownership and 378,663 ha (49.2%) are in private ownership. The share of private forests in the national forest estate has increased by over 6% since 2006. Conifer species are the dominant species present, representing 71.2% of the stocked forest area while broadleaved species accounted for 28.7% of the area. The share of broadleaf species in the national forest estate has increased by 3% between 2013 and 2017. In general, the forest estate is young with nearly half (44.9%) of the stocked forest estate less than 20 years of age.

The national forest estate is an important and expanding sink for carbon, at 312 million tonnes. Based on the NFI data, Ireland's forests have removed an average of 3.8 Mt of carbon dioxide equivalents per year from the atmosphere over the period 2007 to 2016. 0.8 (MT) was added to the pool of harvested wood products in total, as reported in the National Inventory Report to the UNFCCC. Forestry is also a key landuse at the centre of Ireland's transition to a low carbon and sustainable future. In 2017, 42% of the roundwood used in the Republic of Ireland was used for energy generation, mainly within the forest products sector;³

There is an important biodiversity resource within Irish forests, with many non-tree plant species and lichens frequent across the forest estate. Large quantities of deadwood are present within the forest, with over 10.4 million m³ of deadwood present. Forests provide numerous ecosystem services, including the protection and enhancement of water quality, wider habitat linkage, landscape enhancement and opportunities for outdoor recreation and interpretation.

The "Irish National Forest Standard" outlines the criteria and indicators relating to the national implementation of sustainable forest management (SFM). Qualitative and quantitative measures are described by which progress towards the practice of SFM can be monitored under Irish forest conditions. Ireland's "Code of Best Forest Practice" and the Forestry Standards Manual describe all forest operations and the appropriate manner in which they should be carried out to ensure the implementation of SFM.

The following suite of six guidelines are the mechanisms by which the Forest Service ensures that the environmental aspects of SFM are implemented. Adherence to the guidelines is a condition of grant aid and the issuing of a felling licence. The penalty for non-compliance is the withholding of approvals for grants and felling licences.

- Forestry & Archaeology Guidelines
- Forestry & the Landscape Guidelines
- Forest Biodiversity Guidelines

¹ <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/nfi/nfithirdcycle2017/nationalforestinventorypublications2017/>

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<http://www.coford.ie/media/coford/content/publications/projectreports/cofordconnects/WoodflowForestBasedBiomassEnergyUseIreland141218.pdf>

- Forestry & Freshwater Pearl Mussel Requirements
- Forest Harvesting and Environmental Guidelines
- Forest Protection Guidelines

Furthermore, an “Environmental requirements for Afforestation” document was published in 2016 which included additional rules in relation to setback distances from water bodies and improved operational safeguards for site development works such as water crossings, drainage and cultivation.

Underpinning Ireland’s development of the forestry sector is the Forestry Act 2014(the Act), which was commenced on the 24th May 2017. This includes provisions regarding the protection of the environment, creating closer integration with the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the EIA Directive and transposing legislation. Under Sections 5 and 11 of the Act, the role of the Minister in safeguarding the environment is set out. The Environmental Requirements for Afforestation were introduced in December 2016. Further evidence of the Departments commitment to developing the forestry sector in a sustainable manner is demonstrated in recent publications entitled “*Woodland for Water: Creating new native woodlands to protect and enhance Ireland’s waters*” and the “*Felling and Reforestation Policy*”. The first of these documents aims to explore how new native woodland and undisturbed water setbacks can be used in combination to deliver meaningful ecosystem services that protect and enhance water quality and aquatic ecosystems. These opportunities in turn can help contribute to meeting Ireland’s obligations under the 2nd cycle of the WFD. The “*Felling and Reforestation Policy*” will ensure that existing forests are appropriately restructured post-clearfell, to reflect water and other environmental sensitivities on-the-ground.

Planting trees can play an important role in increasing and diversifying farm income. By incorporating forestry into the farming mix, agricultural production can continue alongside timber production while delivering both economic and environmental benefits. Where grazing land is underutilised for example, animals could be moved off the more difficult fields onto more productive land where trees can be grown for timber or firewood for domestic use or for sale in local markets. There is strong evidence to support the position that forestry income makes up a significant proportion of average farm income. For example, according to the Revenue Commissioners recent publication, “*The Farming Sector in Ireland A Profile from Revenue Data Statistics Update 2018⁴*” County Offaly had an averaging farm income of €22,511, the Departments own figures show that the average forestry premium payment to farmers in that County for the same year was €5,774.

Forestry is an important feature of the economic social and environmental landscape of the Midlands Eastern region. Almost 20% of all forests in the country are grown in these counties. It is estimated that some 2,400 jobs are supported by the industry in this area and total timber production from the private sector (grown mostly by farmers) reached an estimated €10 million in 2017. Over 2,000 farmers received an annual premium payment from the Department of Agriculture in 2017, averaging €5,400.

⁴ <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/farming-profile-2018.pdf>

Appendix

COUNTY	Forest Cover					Forests and Farms			Planting			
	County Area '000 hectares	Forest area, hectares	% of county cover	% of national cover	Broadleaf cover as a % of total forest cover, 2017	% forest cover in Private ownership	No of forest owners 1980-2016	No. of farms in county	Total Planting 2017, hectares	Total Planting 2016, hectares	of which Farmer planting 2017, hectares	% broadleaf planting, 2017
Dublin	92,570	6,011	6%	0.8%	40%	33%	81	798	11	3	3 43	39%
Kildare	169,540	10,396	6%	1.4%	65%	54%	335	2,578	33	13	22.23	70%
Laos	172,000	26,462	15%	3.4%	26%	30%	535	3,312	99	163	62.22	15%
Longford	109,130	9,160	8%	1.2%	25%	70%	544	2,601	201	272	150.39	14%
Louth	82,560	2,428	3%	0.3%	40%	50%	77	1,676	22	40	21.85	90%
Meath	234,210	13,326	6%	1.7%	72%	76%	418	4,569	122	105	60.19	50%
Offaly	200,100	29,332	15%	3.8%	54%	67%	656	3,462	166	136	129.87	30%
Westmeath	183,950	15,162	8%	2.0%	52%	58%	526	3,479	207	281	145.96	26%
Wicklow	202,660	36,261	18%	4.7%	28%	38%	565	2,394	148	251	108.37	23%

Sources

- C,D,E,F,G DAFM, National Forest Inventory 2017, <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/forests-service-general-information/1NF1%203MainFindings270618.pdf>
- H DAFM, Forest Statistics - Ireland 2017 <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/forests-service-general-information/ForestStatisticsIreland2017090318.pdf>
- I CSO, Census of Agriculture 2010, <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/agriculture/2010/full2010.pdf>
- J,K,L,M DAFM, Afforestation statistics, <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service-general-information/forests-service-general-information/forests-service-general-information/afforestationstatistics/>

