



# IRISH TIMBER GROWERS ASSOCIATION

17 Castle Street, Dalkey, Co. Dublin  
Tel: +353-1-2350520 Fax: +353-1-2350416  
Email: [itga@eircom.net](mailto:itga@eircom.net)  
[www.itga.ie](http://www.itga.ie)

## **Irish Timber Growers Association submission to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on its Statement of Strategy 2016-2019**

26<sup>th</sup> August 2016

The Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA) was established in 1977 and is the national representative body of private woodland owners in Ireland. The membership of the Association mirrors the wide range of different timber growers in the country and current membership includes farm forest owners, forestry co-operative members, private woodland estates, forestry investors and forestry pension funds. This wide range of membership allows the Association take a broad view of the industry and issues facing the sector.

The Irish Timber Growers Association welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on its Statement of Strategy 2016-2019.

In addressing the questions posed in the Consultation Process for Statement of Strategy 2016-2019, the Association will focus its submission on the sustainable development of the forestry and related sectors to optimise the contribution to national economic development and the natural environment including climate change mitigation. Previous ITGA's submissions including, *ITGA's submission in relation to the 2025 Agri-Food Strategy (January 2015)*, *ITGA's submission in relation to the discussion document on the potential for greenhouse gas mitigation within the agriculture and forest sector (March 2015)* and *ITGA's submission on National Forestry Policy Review* should be taken into account in this consultation process for Statement of Strategy 2016-2019 (these submissions are referenced in the Appendix).

Questions posed in the Consultation Process for Statement of Strategy 2016-2019;

- **How well do DAFM services meet the needs of agri-food/marine sector (What are we doing well and what could we do better)?**

As part of this submission, ITGA reviewed the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) published *Milestones for Success 2014*. The Department should be complimented on the broad achievements of Food Harvest 2020 and the *Milestones for Success 2014* publication highlights the important achievements of the Agri-Food Sector and that it is on course to deliver on the strategy envisaged in Food Harvest 2020, unfortunately however, with one notable exception of the forestry sector.

In relation to specific targets set for the forestry sector in Food Harvest 2020, it had been recognised that climate change would be a significant driver for the sector and specifically it was stated that, '*Forestry options will have a key role to play in helping*

*Ireland meet its overall emissions targets.’ (P.24) It was further recognised that, ‘the role of Irish forests is key to the country meeting its international climate change targets’ and concluded that, ‘This means that the decline in planting levels in recent years will need to be reversed.’*

Given the above drivers, the following recommendations were specifically highlighted in Food Harvest 2020 under **Restoring Competitiveness**;

- *DAFF and Industry should further explore measures to bring about a significant increase in the annual afforestation level per annum to 2020.*
- *DAFF will continue to examine more efficient methods of increasing the planting level in view of its urgency.*

The national afforestation figures for the 6 year period since 2010 are outlined below;

<b>Year</b>	<b>Annual Afforestation (ha)</b>
2010	8314
2011	6653
2012	6652
2013	6249
2014	6156
2015	6293

Despite the assertion in Food Harvest 2020 that declining planting levels will need to be reversed, successive years since the Food Harvest 2020 report have shown a decline in afforestation rates with 2015 showing a reduction of almost 25% over the area that was planted in 2010. This will have significant repercussions for our country’s ability to meet its international climate change targets in addition to its negative effect on renewable energy targets. Also such a decline in planting will have serious repercussions on the industry’s future supply of timber for processing ultimately effecting exports, employment and the rural economy.

Forestry is a long term investment for individuals and the Irish State, however, it will pay significant economic, environmental and climate change dividends in the future. The shortfall in achieving our planting targets now will have more significant knock on effects in future years. This is one of the reasons the forestry sector must be highlighted in the Departments Statement of Strategy 2016-2019.

The potential for Greenhouse Gas (GHG) mitigation within the Agriculture and Forestry sector is well recognised and in the Departments discussion document on the potential for Greenhouse Gas (GHG) mitigation within the Agriculture and Forestry sector (P.41), it states, *‘the forestry sector provides a range of opportunities to mitigate rises in greenhouse gas levels including, afforestation/reforestation, forest management, reduced deforestation (land use change from forest to non-forest), increased use of wood products, use of forest products for bioenergy to replace fossil fuel use.’*

These opportunities for climate change mitigation can be seized by adopting and resourcing a strong policy and strategy for the forest sector and highlighting this in Departments Statement of Strategy 2016-2019. In this regard, a Forest Policy Review Group was established by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to review State forestry policy to take account of its critical role in relation to climate

change and also its importance in relation to renewable energy supply, construction, bio-diversity and its potential to deliver long-term employment in other downstream industries such as eco-tourism, etc. This Group produced a final Report which the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine subsequently adopted and which is entitled, '*Forest Policy Review: Forests, products and people – Ireland's forest policy – a renewed vision.*'

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/forestpolicyreviewforestsproductsandpeople/00487%20Forestry%20Review%20-%20web%2022.7.14.pdf>

This policy and strategy for the forestry sector should be fully resourced and the various strategic actions put into effect so that the forest sector's important goals can be achieved. In relation to the expansion of the forest resource, strategic actions are recommended to increase the forest area, in accordance with sustainable forest management (SFM) principles, in order to support a long term sustainable roundwood supply of 7 to 8 million cubic metres per annum. The main focus of these actions is to increase the level of annual afforestation to 15,000 ha from 2016.

Food Harvest 2020 and currently Food Wise 2025 recognise the potential benefits and contribution of forestry to sustainability and climate change mitigation. As outlined the level of afforestation since Food Harvest was compiled in 2010 is significantly below that recommended. If the future level of afforestation continued at the present rate it would achieve less than 50% of the policy target by 2020 which would have significant repercussions for the potential for greenhouse gas mitigation for the agricultural sector. As outlined in the discussion document on the potential for Greenhouse Gas (GHG) mitigation within the Agriculture and Forestry sector (P.29), one of the 4 main focus areas of the Agriculture Sector Mitigation Action Plan will be 'Increasing the level of forest cover and use of wood products and fuels'. This should be reflected in the Departments Statement of Strategy 2016-2019.

As can be seen from research literature and from the COFORD Forestry 2030 Papers (see <http://www.coford.ie/publications/forestry2030/>), the sector has much to offer our economy, environment, in climate change mitigation, biodiversity, renewable energy and recreation. Ireland possesses the climate and soils to grow forests at a faster rate than most of the developed world, yet only 10.5% of our land area is under forest compared with almost 40% for the rest of Europe. Our forestry and timber sectors hold significant potential to support the growth of the Irish economy and can provide a range of services to Irish society into the future. The Statement of Strategy 2016-2019 must commit to delivery on an effective strategy for the forestry and timber sector in order to ensure it achieves this potential.

- **What are the forthcoming market and other challenges that we need to address and is our current focus adequate to meet those challenges?**

The strategy as outlined in the Forest Policy Review Group Report outlines potential market opportunities and reflects the scale of ambition for the sector.

As an export dependent country the Irish sawmill and panelboard sector have achieved remarkable success in recent years and are exporting most of their finished products. In 2014, 80% of the forest products which were produced in Ireland were exported. Brexit may impact on future exports and the challenges that it poses in exporting timber products as for agricultural products must be addressed in the

Statement of Strategy 2016-2019. To date, the main limiting factor to increasing our exports of finished timber and panelboards was the supply of raw material (roundwood) and this remains a critical issue which must also be addressed in the Statement of Strategy 2016-2019. In relation to the expansion of the forest resource to increase the industry's long term roundwood supply, strategic actions are recommended in the *Forest Policy Review: 'Forests, products and people – Ireland's forest policy – a renewed vision'* to increase our forest area. The main focus of these actions is to increase the level of annual afforestation to 15,000 ha. This planned level of afforestation will help ensure a sustainable level of future timber supply for the wood processing and wood energy sectors.

- **Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016-2019 Departmental strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the agri-food and marine sectors?**

There are significant opportunities for the forestry sector that the Department should consider in developing its Statement of Strategy 2016-2019.

The first positive strategic step that the Department should make is to recognise the forestry sector in the Department's title and in the titles of its framework documents. The query above (also the first query) reflects the lack of profile the forestry sector has within the Department's title where forestry is not mentioned and reflects this lack of profile (.....*which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the agri-food and marine sectors?* )

The forestry sector affects considerably more livelihoods than the equally important Marine sector, where forestry has 21,000 forest owners and employs another 12,000 people. Despite this and its potential contribution to climate change mitigation and renewable energy, forestry is a sector that is not reflected in the Departments title and does not have a significant profile within the Departments Annual Report and Review:<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/publications/2016/DAFM2015AnnualReportFinal140716150816.pdf>

Aside from its substantial contribution to climate change, renewable energy, recreation and biodiversity, the forest industry comprising, growing, harvesting and processing of forest products makes a significant and growing contribution to the Irish economy and the output is valued at €2.3 bn per annum. This significant contribution, with its wider benefits should be appropriately reflected in both the Departments name and its Statement of Strategy 2016-2019.

- **What metrics should the department use to measure our performance and monitor achievement of our strategic goals?**

With regards to the metrics that should be used to measure performance and monitor achievement of the Departments strategic goals, for the forestry sector the Forest Policy Review document, *'Forests, products and people - Ireland's forest policy – a renewed vision'* (Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, 2014), should be the primary document employed. An appropriate way to assess performance would be to monitor progress in the implementation of the stated Strategic Actions in this

Forest Policy Review document so as to achieve the Policy Statements detailed in the document.

## APPENDIX

### ***Links to previous Irish Timber Growers Association submissions referenced in this submission:***

*Irish Timber Growers Association submission in relation to the 2025 Agri-Food Strategy (January 2015)*

<http://www.itga.ie/docs/ITGA%20Submission%20to%202025%20Agri-Food%20Strategy%20Public%20Consultation.pdf>

*Irish Timber Growers Association submission in relation to the discussion document on the potential for greenhouse gas mitigation within the agriculture and forest sector (March 2015)*

<http://www.itga.ie/docs/ITGA%20Submission%20on%20discussion%20document%20on%20potential%20for%20greenhouse%20gas%20mitigation.pdf>

*Irish Timber Growers Association submission on National Forestry Policy Review (March 2010)*

<http://www.itga.ie/docs/ITGA%20submission%20on%20Forestry%20Review.pdf>