



Irish Timber Growers Association

17 Castle Street, Dalkey, Co. Dublin. Tel: (01) 2350520 Fax: (01) 2350416

18th May 2018

Irish Timber Growers Association submission on Reconstitution Scheme (Chalara) and the All Ireland Chalara Control Strategy

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.

ITGA encourages and supports the continuation of a reconstitution scheme for the reconstitution of ash woodlands affected by Ash Dieback disease and the Association welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Forest Service, in relation to the Reconstitution Scheme (Chalara) and the All Ireland Chalara Control Strategy.

The Irish Timber Growers Association would make the following points on the importance of continuing the available supports including the Reconstitution (Chalara) of Woodlands scheme and the Woodland Improvement Scheme (Element 1);

- The continuation of the existing support Schemes is critical in maintaining confidence in the Forestry Programme by ensuring that there is some safety net for those who established Ash woodlands under the State afforestation programme,
- The existing Woodland Improvement Scheme (WIS) element will assist in maintaining the social, environmental and ecological values and benefits associated with ash woodlands and these native and culturally important trees,
- The continuation on this WIS will help foster the retention of genetic diversity and potentially Chalara resistant Ash trees ensuring the presence of ash in the longer term,
- The continuation of the existing Schemes will encourage more active control and reporting of the disease by growers and foresters,
- The national sporting requirement for Ash puts this issue in a different category to other countries.

A most important objective is to continue to control the spread of the disease and to retain confidence in the forestry sector. Therefore, woodland owners and their foresters must be encouraged to report any incidents of the disease and continue to take prompt measures to control the disease. Forest owners need to be encouraged to take centre stage and will continue to require updated information. Consideration of owner preferences is critical in this review of the Reconstitution Scheme (Chalara) and the All Ireland Chalara Control Strategy.

Consequently, growers and their foresters must be motivated to;

- 1/ Continue inspecting their Ash plantations for the disease,
- 2/ Take immediate action if they suspect that *Chalara* is present and,
- 3/ Implement good biosecurity measures to reduce the risk of further spread of the disease.

In relation to the above, woodland owners must be directly engaged and continue to be informed on Ash dieback. Also, any potential Felling Licence issues in clearing sites or Planning Permission issues in replanting areas over 10 hectares with non-broadleaves should be clarified and addressed with prompt responses in Felling Licence applications.

It is important that woodland owners are not disadvantaged in relation to receipt of their annual premium payments if the disease is found on their plantation. Therefore, there should be no changes in relation to premium payments paid to a woodland owner where Ash dieback is discovered on a site. Where Ash plantations must be removed due the presence of the disease, these woodland owners must already bear financial/investment loss without having their forest premium payments reduced or stopped.

Ash Dieback can spread easily and good practice in biosecurity measures must be maintained to prevent further spread of the disease. The most up to date Ash Dieback Disease Sanitation Action Plan is a *Draft Working Template* version dated 31 July 2017, see <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/grantandpremiumschemes/2017/AshDiebackDiseaseSAPTemplatev31July2017090817.pdf>

- This should be updated with any additional research results and information available.

Another good source for biosecurity guidance is [https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCMS028-guidance.pdf/\\$FILE/FCMS028-guidance.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCMS028-guidance.pdf/$FILE/FCMS028-guidance.pdf)

As eradication of Ash dieback is now unlikely, flexible management interventions are required. Assistance through the Woodland Improvement Scheme (Element 1) for restructuring woodlands is important with flexibility available to owners / foresters as to how best to approach silvicultural management in individual woodlands. Solutions should be less prescriptive and more innovative, incorporating agro-forestry and other options in the management of infected Ash woodlands.

In relation to updating the All-Ireland Chalara Control Strategy, it is important to ensure this flexibility in the future management of Ash woodlands. As part of any control strategy such a wide range of silvicultural and management options should be employed and available to growers based on the most up to date scientific advice and best practice. How hedgerows adjacent to Ash sites that are found to be infected with *Chalara* are to be treated should also be addressed and included in the grant provisions. Also, the current skill set of foresters may need to be considered so as to improve silvicultural techniques in the management of older woodlands that contract the disease.

Of the initial All-Ireland Chalara Control Strategy dated July 2013, see <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/treediseases/ashdiebackchalara/AllIrelandChalaraControlStrategyJuly13.pdf>

ITGA believe the following listed Operational Objectives (*see below*) remain relevant, however, given the prevalence of the disease, the first aim ‘Reduce the risk of the disease becoming established in the wider environment’ is more challenging given eradication of the disease is now unlikely;

‘The aims of the Chalara Control Strategy will be delivered through four operational objectives as follows.

1. *Reduce the risk of the disease becoming established in the wider environment.*
2. *Support research on modelling the spread of the disease and developing resistance to the disease.*
3. *Encourage industry, landowner, voluntary organisation and general public engagement and action in tackling the problem.*
4. *Plan for resilience in woodland and to support associated industries in the event that the disease becomes established here in the wider environment.'*

With the amendment highlighted below, the main aim of the initial All-Ireland Chalara Control Strategy dated July 2013 remains very relevant today;

'The aims of this control strategy are to ensure:

All incidents of ash dieback disease found on the island of Ireland are managed consistently and promptly to contain ~~and eradicate~~ the disease, and to minimise the risk of the disease spreading ~~and becoming established.~~

.....

The Irish Timber Growers Association, through its work and various information and representation initiatives, is committed to working with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Forest Service and the wider sector in implementing an All-Ireland Chalara Control Strategy and continuing to control the spread and impact of this disease.