



IRISH TIMBER GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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Irish Timber Growers Association submission in relation to a discussion document on the potential for greenhouse gas mitigation within the agriculture and forest sector

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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 a discussion document on the potential for greenhouse gas mitigation within the agriculture and forest sectors.

Forests provide a range of raw materials for industry in addition to many services to society. One of the most important services provided by forests, climate change mitigation, is strongly dependent on having young age classes to balance out harvest and other reductions in carbon stocks. In order to sustain this absorption of carbon dioxide a well balanced age structure is needed at national forest level in addition to active management of the forest estate. From research undertaken in the relation to Ireland, it has been estimated by COFORD that there is a need to continue afforestation at a level in the region of 15,000 hectares per annum for the next two decades. Achievement of this goal will help sustain the ability of the national forest estate to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and it will also provide a renewable energy resource and a sustainable raw material for construction and a range of other uses. Expansion of the national forest estate should therefore be a key component of national climate change and also land use policy.

In the context of the above required afforestation level, the national afforestation figures for the 4 year period since 2010 were; 2010- 8314 ha, 2011-6653 ha, 2012- 6652 ha, 2013- 6249 ha. Since 2010 each successive year has shown a decline in afforestation rates with 2013 showing a reduction of 25% over the area that was planted in 2010. If this trend continues it will have significant repercussions for our country's ability to meet its international climate change targets in addition to its negative effect on related renewable energy targets. Also such a decline in planting will have serious repercussions on the industry's future supply of timber for processing ultimately affecting 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.

As outlined in the discussion document on the potential for Greenhouse Gas (GHG) mitigation within the Agriculture and Forestry sector (P.41), ‘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. 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.’

This policy and strategy for the forestry sector should now be resourced and the various strategic actions put into effect so that the forest sector’s important climate change mitigation objectives 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.

Food Harvest 2020 recognises the potential benefits and contribution of forestry and afforestation to sustainability and climate change mitigation. The level of afforestation since Food Harvest was compiled in 2010 is significantly below that recommended in the ‘Forest Policy Review: Forests, products and people – Ireland’s forest policy – a renewed vision.’ If the future level of afforestation continued at the present rate it would only achieve c. 46% of the Plan target by 2020 which would have significant repercussions for the potential for greenhouse gas mitigation within the 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 is achievable through working with the sector in the context of the Forest Policy Review Group Report and implementing the various strategic actions to address these policy aims.

The Irish Timber Growers Association through its work and various information and representation initiatives is committed to supporting the sector's critical role in contributing to climate change mitigation. ITGA is actively supporting and promoting forestry's climate change mitigation role in afforestation and active forest management, increasing the use of wood products and also in utilising forest products for bioenergy to replace fossil fuels. These aims are progressed through the various information initiatives including the production of the annual 200 page ITGA Industry Yearbook which is a reference source for the sector, the quarterly ITGA newsletters, development of the Model Timber Sales Dispatch System, the Template Master Tree Sales Agreement, the ITGA Roundwood Price database, www.itga.ie and many other important initiatives. ITGA will continue to play a leading role in achieving the potential for Greenhouse Gas mitigation within the Agriculture and Forestry Sector and the Association looks forward to working with the industry in meeting this objective.