



IRISH TIMBER GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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Irish Timber Growers Association submission on the draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector to 2030 and Beyond

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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 to take a broad view of the industry and issues facing the sector.

The Irish Timber Growers Association welcomes the opportunity to make this submission on the draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector.

There are significant opportunities for the forestry sector to play a major role in the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient economy and society for the future. Forestry's role in the Climate and Air Roadmap for the agriculture and land use sector should be prioritised given its carbon sequestration potential and ability to displace emissions from other farming systems.

Afforestation and creation of new woodlands

From various studies, it has been estimated by COFORD that there is a need to continue afforestation at a level of 15,000 hectares per annum for the next two decades to sustain the ability of our national forest estate to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere in the longer term. Achieving this aim will also provide a renewable energy resource into the future by facilitating the replacement of fossil fuels as a source of energy through the utilisation of forest residues as biomass. In addition, an afforestation programme of 15,000 hectares per annum will also ensure sustainable raw material for construction and a range of other uses with knock on benefits for the longer term storage of carbon. Expansion of the national forest estate should therefore be a key component of Ireland's National Climate Change and Land Use Policy. This objective must therefore be given priority in the National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector to 2030 and beyond.

It should also be noted that in the current Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020, the afforestation targets are a little over half of the targets set in *Forests, products and people - Ireland's forest policy – a renewed vision*, the forest policy which was adopted by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) in 2014. The afforestation figures quoted in the draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector (P.24) of 8,000 hectares per annum are therefore significantly below those recommended in the '*Forest Policy Review: Forests, products and people – Ireland's forest policy – a renewed vision,*'. Ireland's forest policy has an annual planting target of 15,000 per annum from 2016 to 2046. In 2018, only 4025 hectares were afforested which represents only 26.8% of the planting target as set out in the Policy document. It should also be noted that in the Food Wise 2025 Implementation Plan Action 370 includes, '*an increase in annual afforestation level to 15,000 hectares from 2021*'.

If the current low afforestation rate continues into the future, it will have significant repercussions on Ireland's ability to meet its international climate change targets in addition to its negative effect on related renewable energy targets given forests are a source of biomass. Also, the current low planting level will have repercussions on the industry's future supply of timber for processing into long lived carbon storage products and also ultimately affecting exports, employment and the rural economy.

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 11% of our land area is under forest compared with almost 40% for the rest of Europe.

The recent Fact Sheet on Irish Agriculture (July 2019) outlines that, '*Total public expenditure by Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine was over €3 billion in 2018.*' Of this €3 billion Department of Agriculture spend, forestry received less than €98 million or c. 3% of the total Department budget. However, the Irish forestry and timber sector has an annual economic output valued at c. €2.3 billion without considering its climate change and carbon sequestration benefits which are considerable.

The recent (2019) Report on the Socio-Economic Impact of Forestry in Co. Leitrim by Dr. Áine Ní Dhubháin¹, Ms. Evelyn Stoettner¹, Dr. Julie Ballweg¹ and Dr. Serge Garcia² which was commissioned by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine highlighted, '*A suitable modelling approach is provided by O'Donoghue et al. (forthcoming) who use a micro-simulation model, SMILE21, and apply it to the NFS data from 2014 and the CSO data on small farms to generate a modelled micro-dataset from which statistics on agricultural returns are derived for the entire population of farms nationally and for county Leitrim. Micro-simulation modelling is a simulation-based tool that can be used for ex-ante analysis. The methodology is of particular use where there is a dearth of data, data are not complete, or to assess the ex-ante impacts of policy changes. It is a micro-based methodology, utilising micro-units of analysis such as individuals, households, firms and farms, using surveys or administrative datasets (O'Donoghue, 2014).*'

See <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/publications/The%20Socio-Economic%20Impact%20of%20Forestry%20in%20Co.%20Leitrim%20Final%20Report.pdf>

This modelling approach showed that, *‘The estimated percentage of farms in Co. Leitrim where the return from forestry (on a per hectare basis) would be higher than that from agriculture is 67%, while in 74% of the cattle rearing farms the returns from forestry would be higher’.*

However, the Report also highlighted the significant percentage of farms where the return from forestry would be higher than from the following agriculture systems over all counties;

For Cattle Rearing 56.8% of farms nationally would return more from forestry.

For Cattle Other 57% of farms nationally would return more from forestry.

For Sheep 56.3% of farms nationally would return more from forestry.

[Source: Report on the Socio-Economic Impact of Forestry in Co. Leitrim (2019)]

Potential wider role for forestry in National Climate and Air Roadmap

The forestry sector provides a range of opportunities to mitigate rises in greenhouse gas levels, including:

- afforestation/reforestation;
- active 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.

The following must be encouraged and prioritised in the National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector by including specific actions in the roadmap to ensure our national forest’s role is maximised in climate change mitigation:

- Increasing significantly the afforestation rate to achieve stated Forest Policy targets.
- Fostering and supporting active forest management
- Encouraging roundwood and also forest residue mobilisation
- Increasing the use of wood products
- Utilising a wider range of forest products for bioenergy to replace fossil fuels
- Knowledge Transfer and innovative forest technology to facilitate lower emissions from the supply chain.

The draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector refers to ammonia (NH₃) emissions where the agriculture sector accounts for virtually all (99.1%) of ammonia emissions in Ireland. Recent increases in cattle numbers and fertiliser use have seen NH₃ emissions increase for the last five years. The roadmap, however, does not address other air pollution issues or how the agriculture and forestry sector can help reduce such emissions. Maintaining our standard of air quality in Ireland is a growing challenge and is taking on an increased importance with further understanding of the links between poor air quality and human health. The roadmap should highlight how forestry as a land use can make a valuable contribution in mitigating negative effects of poor air quality, regardless of its source. The European Environment Agency (EEA) have estimated a figure of 1,510 premature deaths in Ireland in 2014 (EEA 2017) directly attributable to air quality. World Health Organisation (WHO) guideline values were exceeded at a number of monitoring sites in Ireland for particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}), ozone, SO₂ and NO₂: Forests remove harmful pollution from the environment and this is becoming increasingly well recognised. In the UK Environmental Accounts for woodland ecosystems for example (not available in Ireland), it is estimated that UK woodlands removed more harmful pollution (and carbon dioxide) from the atmosphere than any other habitat, valued at £1.8 billion in 2015. This positive role of forestry and trees in removing harmful emissions and improving air quality should be referenced in the National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector.

Overall, the potential contribution of forestry and woodland creation is not adequately reflected in the current draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector to 2030 and beyond for the reasons outlined above. It should also be noted that in the Teagasc study entitled, ‘An Analysis of Abatement Potential of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030 Prepared by the Teagasc Greenhouse Gas Working Group Gary J. Lanigan & Trevor Donnellan (June 2018), under the heading (P.30) 3.7. 2050 Towards Carbon Neutrality: The Role of Land-use and Functional Soil use, states that, ‘*Under the pathways analysed, increased sequestration from forests and grasslands and increased fossil fuel displacement were seen as likely pathways.*’

Given the sequestration potential of forestry in addition to the positive returns to farmers from forestry on competing marginal lands as highlighted above, the current draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector to 2030 and beyond requires rebalancing in regard to the potential contribution of forestry.