



IRISH TIMBER GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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Irish Timber Growers Association submission on Revised DAFM approach to and supports for plantations impacted by Ash Dieback Disease

ITGA welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and makes the following points on the importance of continuing supports for plantations impacted by Ash Dieback Disease including the Reconstitution of Woodlands scheme and the related Woodland Improvement Scheme.

Category 1

The proposed site clearance grant of €750 / ha would not be sufficient to cover clearance costs on most sites. To cover owner costs, it is important that the €1500/ha site clearance grant level be reinstated. It is assumed in the Revised DAFM approach to and supports for plantations impacted by Ash Dieback Disease that all methods of site clearance are acceptable for grant aid i.e. windrowing, mulching, chipping, whole tree extraction etc.

Category 2

The full reconstitution grant and scheme should be available to all infected sites regardless of the level of infection. Where a site is not showing signs of infection of over 10%, it is a matter of time before it will spread further in the crop. Teagasc and other research on Ash dieback would suggest that the disease will continue to spread within infected Ash plots. Experience from here and the UK is that earlier intervention keeps costs to a minimum because, as the disease spreads, health and safety becomes an issue with dangerous trees consequently with costs further increasing. Underplanting of small sites will often not be economically viable. Also, moving diggers and mulchers, etc will be cost prohibitive on such sites. Full reconstitution is the most viable option for all sites, regardless of age, DBH and top height.

Another major issue with the proposals is the feasibility of ensuring consistent interpretation when measuring stem infection which has potential for causing difficulties in the grant application and administration process. Determining stem infection levels between 1% and 10% by both foresters and forest inspectors who will not be on site at the same time will be open to different interpretations and may lead to additional delays.

Assistance through the Woodland Improvement Scheme for restructuring woodlands is important with maximum flexibility available to owners / foresters as to how best to approach silvicultural management in individual woodlands. Solutions should be less prescriptive and more innovative, potentially incorporating agro-forestry and other options in the management of infected Ash woodlands.

Category 3

Ash was planted on many sites over the years to fulfil broadleaf requirements in DAFM grant schemes or because this was encouraged by DAFM at the time. To exclude many of these woodland owners from the scheme because their plantations are over 25 years of age is entirely unjust and inequitable. The underplanting and reconstitution options should be available to all woodland owners.

Felling licences

All removal of trees under the Ash Dieback scheme must be exempt from a felling license as was the case in the previous scheme.

Reconstitution & Underplanting

“Replace with suitable alternative species” or *“Underplant with suitable alternative species”*, the alternative species should be the decision of the forest owner.

Ash mixtures

It is assumed these schemes will be available on all Ash sites including those that were planted intimately with other species such as Sycamore or others in a 50/50 intimate mixture. On many of these sites the Ash outperformed the Sycamore leaving poorly formed Sycamore that is not viable on its own as a crop into the future, removing the Ash will leave the Sycamore vulnerable. These mixed crops should be entitled to the full reconstitution grant scheme and supporting measures.

It is important that the new scheme taking account of the above would be implemented as soon as possible so as work can start on sites this Spring 2020.

The Irish Timber Growers Association also make the following points on the importance of continuing relevant supports;

Forest owners and their forest managers must be encouraged to take centre stage in maintaining a healthy and productive forest estate.

Ash Dieback can spread easily and good practice in biosecurity measures must be maintained.

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.

ITGA encourages and supports the reintroduction of the reconstitution scheme for the reconstitution of all ash woodlands affected by Ash Dieback disease on the basis of the above submission.