



IRISH TIMBER GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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Irish Timber Growers Association submission on the Draft Agriculture, Forest and Seafood Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan

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 on the draft Agriculture, Forest and Seafood Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan.

Adaptation and building resilience are essential elements in addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change. Therefore, effective risk reduction and adaptation strategies should consider the dynamics of vulnerability and exposure and their linkages with socioeconomic processes, sustainable development and climate change.

Forestry enhances the sustainability of the agriculture sector through its environmental and climate change mitigation and adaptation roles. Forests also positively contribute to our biodiversity, recreation, water protection and flood prevention, renewable energy, air filtration/pollution removal and consequently can play a significant role in climate change adaptation within the agricultural sector.

It is important to note that afforestation and forestry can improve the agriculture sector's ability to adapt to a number of the findings identified in the Nolan's report, '*Ensemble of Regional Climate Model Projections for Ireland*,' highlighted in the draft Agriculture, Forest and Seafood Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan. This is particularly the case in relation to the increased frequency of heavy rainfall events in winter and autumn and river catchment hydrology in association with the increased precipitation. Forests can retain excess rainwater, prevent extreme run-offs and reduce the damage from flooding. They can also help mitigate the effects of seasonal droughts during the spring and summer.

A recent report published by the European Environment Agency (EEA) provides an overview of the water-retention potential of European forests in this regard. The EEA report '[Water-retention potential of Europe's forests](http://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/forests-can-help-prevent-floods)' (see <http://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/forests-can-help-prevent-floods>), shows that such water retention has an important role to play in buffering the effects of heavy rainfall and also droughts. The report states that a better understanding of this role will help develop measures to tackle the effects of climate change and extreme weather events. The volume of water retained by forests can depend on characteristics such as forest cover area, the length of vegetation growing season, tree composition and tree density, as well as the age and the number of layers of vegetation cover. Water retention by forests affects the amount and timing of the water delivered to streams and groundwater by increasing and maintaining infiltration and storage capacity of the soil. Forests can soak up excess rainwater, preventing run-off and damage from flooding reducing the impacts of heavy rainfall events in the autumn and winter and facilitating adaptation to such climate change events. By releasing water in the dry season, forests can also help provide clean water and mitigate the effects of droughts and builds adaptation and resilience on a landscape level in times of lower rainfall. The report shows that water retention potential tends to increase along with the extent of forest cover in a water catchment. Compared to catchments with a forest cover of 10%, total water retention is 25% and 50% higher in water catchments where the forest cover is more than 30% and 70%, respectively. Irrespective of the extent of the catchment's forest cover, water retention is typically about 25% greater in summertime than in wintertime and that coniferous forests in general retain 10% more water than broadleaved forests or mixed forests.

In order to sustain and improve the adaptation benefits of forestry a well-balanced forest age structure is required at national forest level in addition to active management of the forest estate. 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 adapt to climate change. Expansion of the national forest estate should therefore be a key component of our climate change adaptation strategy.

The Irish Timber Growers Association maintain that in light of the particularly strong climate change adaptation and also mitigation benefits of forestry that additional resources should be committed in adaptation and planning to reduce the potential risks to forests of the following threats due to climate change:

- Increased risk of windthrow in forests
- Increased risk of flooding and erosion (which can be mitigated by increased afforestation)
- Increased risk of uncontrolled fires
- Adaptation to future species susceptibility and potential reduced crop yield due to climate extremes - Improve future species choices in relation to climate change adaptation. Improve dissemination of tools which will assist in this regard such as CLIMADAPT.
- Address the impact of potential increased forest pest activity due to climate change such as the potential future impact of large Pine Weevil (*Hylobius abietis*) and the potential for new forest pests to become established in Ireland.
- It is important to improve ongoing forest pest and disease surveillance measures in light of climate change risks.

Additional resources should also be committed to facilitate incorporating climate change adaptation measures into forest management practices and in reducing the potential increased risks to forests due to the effects of climate change outlined above.

The various opportunities for climate change adaptation benefits to the wider agriculture sector afforded by forests should be further developed. For example, one of the priority impacts identified in the draft Agriculture, Forest and Seafood Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan is *'Slurry storage and land spreading issues'* with the consequence of, *'Run-off leading to potential water quality issues. Increased ammonia emissions.'* The forestry sector could offer a potential solution to this by the possibility of spreading excess slurry in suitable younger establishment stage forests away from watercourses. Also, afforestation and agro-forestry can assist the Agri sector in adaptation measures addressing *'Heat stress leading to health impacts for animals and farmers.'*

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 adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity, renewable energy and recreation.

It is notable that the members of the Citizens' Assembly in their recommendations relating to, *"How the State Can Make Ireland a Leader in Tackling Climate Change,"* voted overwhelmingly for a comprehensive Government regime to tackle climate change including the proposition that climate change should be at the centre of policy-making in Ireland. Having heard from numerous experts, 99% of Assembly members recommended that the State should review and revise supports for land use diversification with attention to supports for planting forests.

Growing trees is a long term investment for individuals as well as the Irish State and it will pay significant economic, environmental and climate change dividends into the future where the required afforestation levels are achieved as outlined in national forest policy. A shortfall in achieving our forest policy planting targets will have more significant knock on effects to climate change adaptation in the land use sector in future decades.

Our forestry sector holds significant potential in relation to the State's adaptation to climate change. One of the most important services provided by forests today in terms of climate change adaptation and mitigation is strongly dependent on having young age classes to balance out harvest losses and the increased expansion of our forest estate must be prioritised.