

Michael O' Connor Plant Hire

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a small business owner. I specialise in forestry works. I have worked in forestry since I was a teenager. I set up my own contracting business in 2004 when I was 22 and I have been working almost exclusively in forestry since then. I have seen forestry go from strength to strength in that time and the standard of work is very high compared to that of other industries. The regulations we must work to, particularly in regards to water, habitat protection and the wider environment are second to none. I take a lot of pride in my work and I am thrilled that I have been able to grow my business while doing work that I love. I am based in South Co. Kerry in a rural area and forestry is my main source of work. The people I employ are also based rurally. My business contributes a lot of money to the local economy every year.

Over the last year or so I have seen a serious reduction in work due to the ongoing crisis around license and appeals in the forestry industry. The foresters that I do work for are telling me that they will have very little work for next year due to lack of licences and appeals. I understand from speaking to the foresters that I work for that there are many appeals being made against the felling licences which means that timber cannot be brought to market. This means that there is no need for my work as I am involved in repairing roads and replanting. I also understand that the majority of the appeals are being made by very few people. The people who are making the appeals are often living hours away from the forests that they are appealing. To me, this seems like the system is being misused. It is totally unreasonable that so few people can make so many people suffer.

My household depends totally on forestry as my wife is also employed in the sector. I am getting very worried that I won't be able to fulfil my business payments and that my wife and I won't be able to make ends meet if things don't get better very soon.

I was therefore relieved when I heard that there are changes to the appeals bill being proposed. I support the proposed changes totally. In particular, I see that one of the amendments that are being proposed is that there will be a fee introduced if people want to make an appeal. I am completely in favor of that. If one or two people want to stop work in an industry they should have to pay a fee to do so. If I want to appeal my neighbours building a shed I would have to pay. Forestry appeals should be no different. This will be a positive thing and I think It will help the industry get back on its feet again.