

Laois Sawmills Ltd

To whom it may concern,

My name is [REDACTED] and I work for Laois Sawmills Ltd based outside Portlaoise. I am one of two timber buyers for the sawmill. I have been waiting a long time for this bill to come around and I hold a keen interest in it and the outcome of it.

On a daily basis, I am working with foresters, landowners, harvesting contractors, hauliers, sawmillers and many more. So I'd like to think I have a fair knowledge of what the feeling is on the ground from people in afforestation at the beginning of the cycle to clearfelling at the end of the cycle.

The feeling from myself and others in the industry is anger. For a sector that employs 12,500 people and has a turnover of approximately 2.2 billion (Beef industry has approx 2.3 billion), it seems shocking that appellants, mainly one serial appellant Mr Peter Sweetman can bring that industry to its knees. Forestry is promoted throughout Europe as a way of fighting climate change and a way of the future.

We hear from the government about how planting has to step up and the percentage of forest cover has to increase. For this to happen, we need a sustainable forest cycle from start to finish. Sadly, we are going backwards instead of forward. Planning for anything at the moment in forestry is just impossible, whether that's thinning or even building a road. Everything is drawn out and just seems to be a lottery as to when you will get a green light to get on with the job.

Everything seems to be blocked up in the Forestry appeals committee (FAC) with very little movement. From the outside looking in, it just seems to me that the FAC is not fit for purpose, is completely under-resourced and is in need of major change. But this all seems to go back to a big problem, and that problem is that a select few people are appealing against everything that comes out of the forest service all over the country. In my opinion, it's quite a joke that a person living in County Cork can appeal a felling licence issued in County Donegal, even though they have very little knowledge of the site or the area it's in and have never even walked the site.

And for these reasons, I am in strong favour of the proposed changes presented in the draft. And if these changes don't go ahead, more jobs will be lost. Also more companies that have invested large sums of money in the thinking that this is an industry that will only grow stronger into the future will be forced to shut. And I wish I was only scaremongering saying jobs have and will be lost but sadly, it's reality.

Kind regards,

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