

Laois Farm Forestry Group

The Laois Farm Forestry Group (LFFG) was established in 2009 to represent private forestry owners in County Laois. Promoted by the Teagasc Forest Development Department, IFA Farm Forestry and local forest owners, it provides a representative voice for private forest owners with plantations now approaching or at the stage of timber production. The group welcomes the opportunity afforded to make a submission in relation to the Draft Agriculture Appeals (Amendment) Bill 2020.

LFFG is acutely aware of the turmoil and uncertainty currently permeating the forest industry at all levels in Ireland. Its members have heeded long standing government and EU policy to diversify their farm activity and have afforested lands in their ownership. However, the recent exacerbation of delays in the issuing of licences for afforestation and felling have both hindered forest owners from attending to critical management operations for their forest and impeded the afforestation targets set under the Climate Action Plan. Government policy has also directed management of forestry to produce commercial crops while ensuring compliance with environmental standards.

For some time now third parties have exerted undue influence on the existing licensing and appeals procedures to the detriment of primary producers, wood processors, rural communities and wider society. There is no doubt that it is placing the forest sector at huge risk. This influence appears driven by egos and is based on wilful misinterpretation of science and scare tactics.

LFFG believes that confining the appeals process to 'relevant' parties will limit the burden placed by serial objectors whom have little consideration either for the grounds of their appeal or for the gravity of their actions. Furthermore, LFFG considers the introduction of a prescribed fee for appeals may filter the submission of appeals to those with a genuine concern over relevant approvals or decisions made. Finally, LFFG ask that the proposed Bill reflects policy, equity to all parties and is based on sound and credible evidence.

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