

Submission from Coillte in relation to the Forests, Products and People, Ireland's forest policy – a renewed vision

15th March 2017

Dear Alan,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Policy Document.

Since the document was published in 2014, there have been changes in the external environment which will have direct and indirect influences on forest policy and players in the forest sector.

We would ask that the review would consider the potential significant implications for forestry, largely an export market at present of Brexit and what policy updates and incentives will be required to ensure that the sector remains competitive.

Another significant event since the publication of the document is the Paris Agreement on climate change and climate change mitigation. Ireland with a low forest cover is uniquely placed to address some of these issues. We would welcome a review of policies targeted at existing forest owners to recognise the benefits of their forests for both sequestering carbon dioxide, and the use of their timber and timber products as a carbon friendly substitute for fossil fuel based and high energy demanding non-renewable products.

The Policy Document outlines a consolidation of environmental legislative and regulatory requirements and we would welcome and support any simplifications and rationalisations that can be made in this arena, that will allow forestry to continue to deliver environmental benefits yet not over constrain or reduce the productivity of the estate. A critical review of the existing guidelines and requirements would be useful in this regard.

The Policy document states that a better understanding of the value of non-timber benefits will be fostered through continued research and information dissemination by DAFM and these should be taken into account in any economic appraisal of forestry at the national level. Coillte would greatly welcome such an approach to examine and quantify in economic terms the value of the public goods delivered from forest lands to the public, including recreational, environmental, cultural and landscape values. New approaches are emerging in this arena since the publication of the document in 2014 in the field of Natural Capital Assessment which aims to provide a structured and transparent way of quantifying the full value of the services provided by the natural assets of forest owners and the impact of the owner's management of them. Natural Capital accounting reflects both value to the forest owner and to wider society at large. Mechanisms to assess this value delivered and recognition of the services delivered by the forest owner would be a welcome inclusion.

In conclusion, we very much welcome the review and hope that the above items can be incorporated at the review phase,

Best wishes

Pat

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