

Irish forestry and the economy

- The forest industry, comprising growing, harvesting and processing of forest products makes a significant and growing contribution to the Irish economy. Output in 2008 was c. €1.89 bn, or just under 1% of GDP.
- Over 10% of Ireland is under forest, supporting a vibrant and export oriented forest products sector.
- Contribution to climate change by Irish forests absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere is 4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, or about 6% of total greenhouse gas emissions.

In terms of complying with Kyoto targets, the annual contribution from afforestation post-1990 will be around 2.2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, representing a projected annual saving to the taxpayer of €44 million, or €220 million over the five years from now to the end of 2012.

- Harvest from Irish forests in 2008 was 2.3 million cubic metres; of which 2.1 million were from Coillte and the balance (0.2 million) was from privately-owned forests. After processing into secondary wood products the harvest represents an additional store of circa 0.6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, over and above forest growth.
- Employment in the forest sector is over 16,000 persons, spread across the country and contributing directly to both rural development and in adding value to forest harvest. It has been estimated that if 15,000 hectares are planted per year, on average 490 direct jobs would be required annually to establish, manage, harvest and process that timber. The direct employment (over 40 years) associated with 15,000 hectares planted in 2009 therefore averages 490 man-years annually.
- Apart from climate change benefits, forests provide the largest outdoor area for recreational use. This has been valued at €97 million, which in turn generates €268 million in economic activities for communities in rural areas. Annual visitor numbers to Irish forests are in excess of 18 million.
- There is a significant potential for wood fuel to displace fossil fuel, particularly in the generation of heat in industrial, commercial, domestic and institutional markets.
- Investment in business-led and national forest research (including COFORD funding of €4 m) is €14 million per annum, just over 0.7% of overall output. As a comparison, the most recent figures available for investment in ocean and fisheries sciences in the Marine Institute budget represented 1.1% of the overall output.