

Foreword

I wish to thank the Irish Timber Growers Association for inviting me to contribute a Foreword for the *Forestry and Timber Yearbook 2012* as it gives me an opportunity to communicate with people actually operating in the sector. The Yearbook is a key source of information for people in the forestry sector as it includes relevant articles, statistics and a directory of contacts, all of which are presented in an easily accessible and convenient format. I would like to congratulate the Irish Timbers Growers Association on their continued publication of this invaluable Yearbook.

As people actively involved in the sector, we all know the significant progress that has been made in forestry over the years, which is evident from the increase in forest cover to some 11% of our land area and the ongoing development of an indigenous Irish industry. We also appreciate the key role forestry makes in terms of employment, exports, climate change mitigation, renewable energy, recreation and tourism. However, we are all keenly aware of the challenges to deliver further on the potential of our forests.

One of these challenges is to get the timber out of our forests onto the market so that forest owners can not only yield a return on their investment, but also maximise it.

Since my appointment as Minister of State with responsibility for forestry, I have met a number of forestry owners and groups and I know a lot of work is being undertaken by forest owners, their representative bodies such as ITGA, forestry producer groups and Teagasc Forestry Development Department to address that challenge.

An issue of particular concern to me was the extensive forest fires in early 2011 and the losses to forest owners. My Department is working on a number of recommendations made by a Working Group on the subject of land and forest fires including the publication of a set of guidelines to inform and assist land owners. The emphasis in these guidelines will be on the proper methods of controlled and



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legal burning. We will also continue the information and awareness campaign that began earlier this year.

In the meantime, I would urge forest owners to be vigilant against the threat of fire and to consider what they can do to protect their investment. This may mean having insurance against the possible loss including replanting costs, keeping fire breaks clear and making sure that they have a fire plan if the worst should happen. I am confident that, working together, the threat of uncontrolled fire can be addressed and it is in all our interests to try to ensure that there is no repeat in 2012 of the damage we saw earlier this year.

I look forward to continuing to work with the forestry industry and the ITGA, as well as the various representative organisations and stakeholders, to develop a strong forestry sector that can continue to contribute to our economic well-being in the future.



*Shane McEntee TD
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