

Foreword

2015 will be a landmark year in the development of Irish forestry and I am therefore pleased to avail of this opportunity to update readers of the ITGA Forestry and Timber Yearbook on relevant issues. This yearbook is a valuable source of information for everybody involved in the forestry sector so it is fitting that I, as Minister for State with responsibility for forestry, outline developments to you directly.

Ireland's forestry and forest products sector has grown and developed substantially over the last few decades, and I believe that it still has significant potential. As I write this, the Irish forestry sector is entering a period of change due to developments that will shape the future of our forestry industry for years and decades to come.

2015 sees the roll-out of a new Forestry Programme to cover the period to 2020. I published the proposed details in September 2014 for public consultation, following which the draft Programme is submitted to the European Commission for their approval. At the time of writing, the draft programme is being finalised for submission. The new Programme proposes a suite of 11 measures with increased grant and premiums rates for new afforestation projects. The overall aim of the proposed measures is to increase forest cover and generate additional supplies of timber and wood biomass to meet the increased demand expected to come from the wood processing and renewable energy sectors in the years ahead.

The proposals demonstrate the commitment of the Government to the continuation of the forestry programme and to the ongoing development of the forestry industry. I am hopeful that these proposed measures, if approved by the Commission, will encourage farmers and other land owners to seriously consider forestry as a viable land use option, thereby increasing our overall afforestation level.

There are other important policy initiatives under way at present that will have long term impacts on the sector. In July 2014, I launched the final report and recommendations of the Forest Policy Review Group entitled 'Forests, Products and People'. The review contains over 100 recommendations and represents a consensus view among a wide range of



Tom Hayes TD
Minister of State with
responsibility for forestry at the
Department of Agriculture, Food
and the Marine.

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forest sector stakeholders. It has been considered in formulating the new national forestry programme and analysis of its many recommendations will be ongoing.

Also, as I write, the passage of the Forestry Bill 2013 through the Houses of the Oireachtas is near completion. The purpose of the Bill is to reform and update the legislative framework relating to forestry in order to support the development of a modern forestry sector. It is the outcome of an exhaustive consultation process and I am confident that the new legislation will reflect the developments in the years since the current forestry legislation was enacted in 1946 and lay the legislative groundwork for the future of the industry.

In addition to operational, policy and legislative developments, a new Strategic Research Agenda for Forestry in Ireland “Forest Research Ireland (FORI) – meeting the needs of Ireland’s forest sector to 2017 and beyond through research and innovation” was launched in October 2014. Research and innovation are essential in all sectors. FORI, which was developed under the auspices of the sector-led COFORD Council Forest Research Working Group, involving a wide diversity of stakeholders and co-ordinated by Research Division of the my Department, captures specific policy, knowledge and production focused research topics and ideas relevant to the needs of forest stakeholders.

While it is important to acknowledge and appreciate the development of forestry to date, I believe that the forestry sector has enormous potential for the future in terms of the economic, environmental, climate change, recreation and tourism benefits that it can deliver. I am committed to working with you and your representative bodies to achieve that potential in 2015 and beyond.



Tom Hayes TD
Minister of State
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine