

Forestry funding for 2014-2020 to carry through to 2021 before a new programme is in place

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The biggest challenge facing the sector is to increase annual afforestation from an estimated 2,400ha in 2020 to 8,000ha as agreed in the Government's Climate Action Plan.

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Existing forestry grants and premia will remain in place until a new programme is agreed between the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the European Commission and the forestry and forest products sector so 2020 rates are provided in the following report. At the time of writing the sector is making submissions to the Department's Statement of Strategy 2021-2024 (see ITGA submission page 14).

There is a major challenge facing the sector as afforestation fell to an unsustainable level during 2015 to 2020 (Table 1) so much work needs to be done in 2021 to revitalise the planting programme.

In addition, felling licences dropped alarmingly low from 2019 to the end of 2020, threatening wood mobilisation and jobs throughout the sector.

Table 1. Planting targets (ha) for afforestation and output 2015-2020

SCHEME	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
Afforestation	5,700	6,300	6,475	6,700	6,925	7,450	39,550
Native woodland	500	500	500	500	500	500	3,000
Agroforestry	10	20	25	40	50	50	195
Energy/fibre	100	200	500	500	1,000	1,000	3,300
TOTAL	6,310	7,020	7,500	7,740	8,475	9,000	46,045
TOTAL ACHIEVED	6,293	6500	5536	4,025	3,550	2,500*	28,404

Source: Adapted from Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (2015-20). *Estimate.

This was due to a dramatic increase in licence appeals throughout 2020. This situation should be helped since Minister of State Pippa Hackett announced the Forestry (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 which commenced on enactment on Tuesday 6th October while the legislation required to give effect to the main provisions of the Act came into force the following day.

In parallel with these developments, fees are introduced for forestry applications, submissions and appeals bringing forestry in line with other planning systems. Forestry regulations provide for the charging of a fee of €20 per forestry licence application, and per submission in relation to such applications. Forestry Appeals Committee Regulation, 2020 provides for certain matters pertaining to the forestry licence appeals process and for the charging of €200 for all classes of appeal.

In addition, a forestry portal, with all application and site details available in a single website, will soon be opened to ensure more visible and transparent access to the forestry licensing process.

BUDGET

Minister of State Pippa Hackett announced an allocation of over €100m for forestry in Budget 2021. "We must get forestry moving again," she said. "But we must also ensure it works for all. I really want 2021 to be a year when we all 'Think Trees' and I look forward to using the strong budget allocation for forestry to deliver a range of schemes and incentives which will deliver diversity of planting, climate action and biodiversity as well as supporting a healthy industry."

Table 2: Afforestation grant rates (€/ha) for grant premium categories (GPCs) in Forestry Programme (2015-2020) to be extended throughout 2021.

Grant / premium category (GPC)	1st Grant	2nd Grant	Fencing to IS436 standard	Total available funding
1 - Unenclosed	1605	535	600	2740
2 - Sitka spruce / lodgepole pine	2330	775	600	3705
3 - Conifers broadleaves	2410	805	600	3815
4 - Diverse conifer broadleaves	2785	925	600	4310
5 - Broadleaf	3960	1320	600	5880
6 - Oak	4215	1405	600	6220
7 - Beech	4215	1405	600	6220
8 - Alder	2695	900	600	4195
9 - Native Woodland Establishment (Scenarios 1-3)*	4215	1405	600	6220
10 - Native Woodland establishment (Scenario 4)**	3960	1320	600	5880
11 - Agro-forestry	4215	1405	600	6220
12 - Forestry for Fibre	2410	805	600	3815

*Soils: podzols, brown podzolics and brown earths. ** Soils: brown earths.

New Scenario 5 in GPC 9 or 10.

Source: Adapted by D. Magner from Dept. Agriculture, Food & Marine, 2020.

Table 3: Annual afforestation premiums (€/ha) for grant premium categories (GPCs) in Forestry Programme (2015-2020) to be extended throughout 2021.

Grant / premium category (GPC)	Revised rates <10ha	Revised rates >10ha	Number of years
1 - Unenclosed	185	190	15
2 - Sitka spruce / lodgepole pine	440	450	15
3 - Diverse conifer/broadleaf	510	520	15
4 - Diverse conifers	590	600	15
5 - Broadleaf	605	620	15
6 & 7 - Oak, beech	645	660	15
8 - Alder	605	620	15
9 & 10 - Native Woodland Establishment schemes	665	680	15
11 - Agro-forestry	645	660	5
12 - Forestry for Fibre	510	520	15

Source: Adapted by D. Magner from Dept. Agriculture, Food & Marine, 2020.



Sycamore and sweet chestnut, acceptable broadleaf species under GPC5.

The following measures in the forestry programme will apply until a new programme is announced. The information when it is agreed will be featured in the ITGA newsletter. We feature key measures from the forestry programme.

MEASURE 1: AFFORESTATION AND CREATION OF WOODLANDS

The revised Afforestation Grant and Premium Schemes in 2017 will continue throughout 2021. Details on the grants and premia are provided in Tables 1 and 2 (page 32). The afforestation premium period is 15 years with the exception of agroforestry. The minimum area eligible for planting is 0.1ha for broadleaves and 1ha for conifers.

The minimum mandatory broadleaf requirement is 15% while the Grant and Premium Categories (GPCs) remain as in 2020. These are:

GPC 1 – Unenclosed/Unimproved land

Typically comprises upland sites and marginal soils. The amount of unenclosed land in any application for financial approval cannot exceed 20% of the total area. The ITGA along with the IFA and forestry companies wish to review this requirement as recommended by the Mackinnon Review

GPC 2 – Sitka spruce/lodgepole pine

Does not comply with scheme requirements in isolation and can only be approved as a component of a larger project comprising other GPCs.

GPC 3 – 10% Diverse Conifer/Broadleaf

Comprises a mix of Sitka spruce/lodgepole pine together with at least 10% diverse conifer while broadleaves adjacent to roads and watercourses may also form part of this 10%.

GPC 4 – Diverse Conifers

Acceptable conifer species, other than Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine including Norway spruce, Scots pine and Douglas fir.

GPC 5 – Broadleaves

Acceptable broadleaf species – other than oak and beech – including, sweet chestnut, sycamore and maple .

GPC 6 – Oak

Pure oak, however nurse species may be planted where additional shelter required.



Review of forestry programme may consider extending five-year premium period for agroforestry.

GPC 7 – Beech

Pure beech, however nurse species may be planted where additional shelter required.

GPC 8 – Alder/birch

Pure alder or improved birch with up to 10% of other species for diversity.

GPC 9 and GPC 10 – Native Woodland Establishment

This category supports the establishment of new native woodlands on 'green field' sites with focus on native species, minimal site disturbance and long-term 'close-to-nature' management (see Native Woodland Scheme page 40). It provides opportunities for planting in environmentally sensitive areas.

GPC 11 – Agroforestry

Silvopastoral agroforestry is a combination of trees and pasture where silage and hay production and sheep grazing are also permitted. Review may consider extending five-year premium period.

GPC 12 – Forestry for Fibre

This scheme supports fast-growing tree species to produce wood biomass yields in the region of 150-300 m³/ha over 10 to 15 years.

MEASURE 2: NEIGHBOURWOOD SCHEME

- The scheme will be open to applications throughout the year.
- Increase allocation will be made available to reflect the scale of works being undertaken within individual projects under this scheme.

MEASURE 3: FOREST ROAD

- Rates: €35 to €40/m.
- €5,000 available for special construction works and in some circumstances a further €800 per application provided for forest entrance.

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The Woodland Improvement Scheme is open to non grant aided broadleaf forests and all broadleaved mixtures that meet the required eligibility criteria.

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MEASURE 4: RECONSTITUTION

The objective of this scheme is to restore the forest to its original form following significant damage by natural causes but excluding damage caused by fire. Natural causes eligible for funding include damage associated with frost, drought, diseases, deer, grey squirrel and vole. (see also ash RUS, page 40)

MEASURE 5: WOODLAND IMPROVEMENT SCHEME (WIS)

- The WIS scheme is open to non grant aided broadleaf forests and all broadleaved mixtures that meet the required eligibility criteria.
- All broadleaved forests, including mixtures are eligible for 2nd thinning grants of €500/ha.

Support for Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF)

The CCF element of WIS is open to conifer, mixed and broadleaf forests. Successful applicants are eligible for three WIS payments (€750) for three separate interventions under the WIS scheme over a period of 12 years,

The work needs to be in line with the approved transformation to CCF plan.

MEASURE 6: NATIVE WOODLAND CONSERVATION

- Grant available under the Public High Forest category to that of the Private High Forest.
- Allow access to forest fencing and tree shelter scheme.
- Fencing allowances available under the Afforestation Grant & Premium Scheme also apply to NWS Conservation.

MEASURE 7: KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND INFORMATION ACTIONS

A national scheme for Forestry Knowledge Transfer Groups (KTGs) was introduced in 2018, focusing on the mobilisation of timber and biomass.

The KTGs are designed to recruit up to 1,000 participants to attend forestry field days, classes and demonstrations. KPIs are likely to take place in 2021 subject to Covid-19 guidelines.

THE NATIVE WOODLAND SCHEME (NWS)

The purpose of this scheme is to identify, at pre-application stage, the most appropriate native woodland type to promote onsite. The NWS Forester (and the NWS Ecologist, under NWS Conservation) appraises the site in terms of its location, soil and main habitats and vegetation, and matches it to one of the following five scenarios (with matching woodland type), named after the basic soil type:

- Scenario 1: Podzols (oak-birch-holly woodland)
- Scenario 2: Brown Podzolics (oak-birch-holly with hazel woodland)
- Scenario 3: Brown Earths (oak-ash-hazel woodland)
- Scenario 4: Gleys (alder-oak-ash woodland)
- Scenario 5: Highly modified peat and peaty podzols (pioneer birch woodland)

New native woodland established in Griggins townland, Maam Valley, Co. Galway featuring alder, birch, Scots pine, sessile and pedunculate oak, mountain ash, grey willow and holly.

The framework then identifies the associated woodland type and the relevant species mix and planting pattern to promote it, either through afforestation (under NWS Establishment), or restoration planting or reforestation (both under NWS Conservation).



GRANT RATES FOR RUS

Grant rates are as follows at appropriate GPC:

- Reconstitution – site clearance @ €1,000/ha cleared.
- Underplanting – site clearance @ €1,000/ha while underplanting grant paid at up to 60%, based on replanting up to 50% of the infected crop.

At the time of writing 200 RUS applications have been received by the Department.

ASH RECONSTITUTION AND UNDERPLANTING SCHEME (RUS)

RUS was announced in June 2020 aimed at forest owners with ash dieback. RUS has the following objectives:

- Encourage the active management of ash plantations with ash dieback disease.
- Promote the vigorous growth of ash through thinning to optimise as much as possible of the crop.
- Support the removal of the affected ash crop and replacement with alternative species.
- Build resilience and diversity and possibly identify tolerant or resistant individual trees.

Financial support is available for:

- Site clearance – complete or partial clearance – before underplanting and reconstitution.
- Reconstitution – replacement of ash trees. All GPCs are available including agroforestry.
- Underplanting – involves the partial replanting of an ash plantation following partial clearance through systematic felling. All GPCs are available.



The RUS provides financial support for site clearance, reconstitution and underplanting.

The reconstitution/underplanting grant is paid in three instalments:

1. Application for the site clearance grant.
2. Application for the 1st instalment grant made following reconstitution and/or underplanting (75%).
3. Application for the 2nd Instalment grant may be made four years after the site is successfully reconstituted or underplanted (25%).

A felling licence is not required under the RUS.