

Time to introduce a national carbon code

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Carbon sequestration and storage are acknowledged as major benefits in sustainable forest management and sustainable wood use especially in construction where timber displaces fossil based materials.

The recent renewed interest in carbon ownership also highlights how little has been done in Ireland on issues such as carbon trading and offsetting. We are lagging well behind the UK whose Woodland Carbon Code (WCC) is the quality assurance standard for forest woodland creation projects. The WCC generates independently verified carbon units to companies who wish to offset their carbon emissions. It provides these companies with the opportunity to purchase units from forest owners in advance of sequestration to help them eventually reach net zero emissions.

Ireland is well positioned to develop its own carbon code. Much of the groundwork is already underway. Teagasc's Forest Carbon Tool is the first major step in providing an indication of how much carbon can potentially be removed through various forest establishment options and other climate mitigation pathways, such as the use of harvested wood products. Ireland has an excellent record in tracking forest carbon stocks, which has been carried out by the Forest Service National Forestry Inventories since 2006. From this exercise, we know that in 2017, our forest carbon stock was 311.7 million tonnes (mt) comprising 246.6mt in the soil, 55.9mt in living trees including roots and 9.2mt in deadwood and litter. Close to half of carbon stocks are now in private forests.

Unlike other Member States, Ireland is in a unique position to increase forest cover by 60%, which highlights the potential to avail of the carbon farming initiative, announced by the EU Farm to Fork Strategy, which, *inter alia*, will reward forestry that is compatible with agriculture. Ireland can avail of a similar template by establishing a national carbon code. The benefits are enormous for Irish forestry and agriculture as well as meeting our greenhouse gas emission targets now agreed in the Climate Action Plan.



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