

## Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Change

11 December 2019

**Opening contribution by Brian Murphy, Chairman of Forest Industries Ireland and CEO of Balcas Limited, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh.**

### **1. Opening remarks**

Thank you for the opportunity to come today and discuss the contribution forestry and timber are making to combatting climate change.

FII is only 1 year old. We want to increase knowledge and awareness about forestry and timber. We'd love to better inform our fellow citizens about this industry, its prospects and challenges, and about its contributions to climate change.

I believe you have our introductory document.

### **2. Introduction**

I myself am the Chief Executive of Balcas Limited. We have two factories, one in Enniskillen, another at Invergordon in Scotland. We process 1 million m<sup>3</sup> of sustainable forest output annually. From this we produce wood products for construction, fencing, and packaging. Balcas generates all its own electricity and we sell as much again to the grid (that is more electricity than all of the private homes of Co. Fermanagh use). We also make wood pellets. Our heat fuel output annually displaces 100 million litres of oil from Ireland and Britain.

We have no wood fibre waste.

### **3. Forest Industries Ireland**

I am also the Chairman of Forest Industries Ireland.

Forest Industries Ireland is an all island body constituted within Ibec. Our member companies cover the whole supply chain. There are nurseries that grow the saplings; we have forestry consultants who work with farmers and landowners to plant and manage their forests; we have factories that

convert the forest crop into construction timber, panel products, fencing materials, packaging and biofuel.

#### **4. The forest and timber sector**

For many decades, the state and our people have invested in increasing afforestation in Ireland. In return, Ireland has an industry that provides 12,000 jobs throughout our rural communities. The economic contribution is of the order of €2.3 billion per annum.

Over the coming years, the private forests planted in the 80s and 90s will come to maturity and deliver a major supply increase onto the market. This is a further opportunity for Ireland. Today, we work with more than 20,000 farmer forest owners. Most of them have made the decision to plant a portion of their farm. They get a steady and reliable income and it delivers a valuable crop when the forest matures. Increasingly too, farmers are interested in the environmental contribution that their forests make.

#### **5. Forestry, timber and climate change**

In Ireland, our forests produce timber at three times the rate of Scandinavia. They are a major carbon sink.

Forestry in Ireland is therefore already a big part of this island's fight against climate change. Irish forests are capturing 3.6 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> yearly. The total carbon store is over 300 million tonnes. This is testament to the policies of successive governments to plant trees and create a vibrant forest sector.

All over the world, forests have been identified as the most scalable opportunity opportunity to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. In Ireland we have learned a lot. We are increasing diversity and balance in our forests. We are providing more leisure and recreational opportunities for our citizens. We are increasing the provision of one of nature's great renewable raw materials.

#### **6. The timber construction opportunity**

We should increasingly seek to use our own timber as a mass-market construction material. Wood can displace cement and steel in our built environment. It is doing so today throughout the world.

The world's tallest timber building was completed in Norway this year. It has 18 stories of apartments. Wood is being used to remodel, expand, and extend the life of existing structures using the existing foundations.

In Ireland too, we should embrace greater use of timber. This requires changes to our building regulations. The Government can take a lead by enabling more timber housing and procuring new greener schools and civic buildings which use Cross Laminated Timber as the backbone of their structure.

## **7. Forest policy**

Ireland's commitments to climate change are already being supported by our growing forests. To continue this into the future, we must plant more and continue to improve forest management. We've done well to climb back from less than 1% forest cover 100 years ago to the 11% of today. Now is the time to redouble our efforts and build a coalition of farmers, foresters and policy makers to drive continued forest development. Farmers are the foundation of future policy. Industry and government must rise to the challenge of rewarding these farmers. Without enthusiastic participation from all, we can't maintain the positive growth of forestry in this country.

Minister Bruton's climate action plan has an annual target of 8,000 hectares of new afforestation. We need to support our farmers and rural communities. We want them to feel encouraged to see forestry as a positive option on their farms, both for the sake of the environment and for a reliable family income.

We all want to find ways to diversify the forest estate. Already, around 30% of the trees we plant are broadleaf. We want to increase the creation of native woodland. We can do this in a way that goes hand in hand with the creation of conifer forests and the economic value they contribute. The greatest driver of broadleaf planting in Ireland right now is planting alongside Sitka Spruce.

## **8. Conclusion**

This sector is calling for a renewed vision for forestry in Ireland – one based on economic development, climate change goals, biodiversity, and social values. We need stakeholders to come together and agree the way forward, rather than have different groups pulling in different

directions. Forestry and timber can make a great positive impact on climate change. If we get it right, it will work for everyone.