

Submission to the Joint Committee on Agriculture and the Marine on behalf of LTWO

THE ASH DIE PROBLEM

Brief History.

Ash Die Back now known as (*Hymenoscyphus Fraxineus*) was discovered in 1992 in Eastern Europe and since then has spread throughout Europe.

It is a windborne fungal disease, much like potatoe blight. There is currently no means of treating this disease. The spores can travel 20 to 30 kilometres in the air and infect the Ash trees through their leaves causing the leaves to wilt and ultimately cause the tree to die.

It was first reported in Ireland in 2012 has spread throughout the country and is going to wipeout 95% of our native Ash.

We are an island nation more than 30 kilometres from our nearest neighbour therefore we should have been in a position to prevent the invasion of the disease with proper phytosecurity. Plants were imported from Europe where the disease was prevalent.

This importation defied logic as Ash is a native tree and should have been propagated here.

ISSUES:

1. There is 20,000 hectares (approx) of privately planted Ash in Ireland, all of which will ultimately be infected.

Ash trees were planted by farmer/ foresters primarily because it is a native broadleaf fast-growing, high commercial potential (hurley making being the primary use and other uses furniture, kitchens, boat building). It also has a high biodiversity value.

2. The current Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (RUS) announced on 10th June 2020 has been completely rejected by farmer/foresters and all their representative bodies as it does not adequately address the enormous losses sustained and the extremely restrictive conditions imposed.

A clearance grant, of €1,000 goes nowhere near the cost of clearing, which can be in excess of €3,000 /€4,000 per acre depending on the size and age of the plantation.

The AFFOROSTATION pioneers who planted over 25 years ago, these people are relied upon within the sector for advice and experience. They are precluded from participation in the RUS scheme. This is leading to a prevailing disillusionment.

The value of these plantations has been reduced to the value of firewood. At this point they should be 15 years away from a significant commercial value not to mention the environmental benefit of decades of work being undone.

A major incentive in planting Ash trees was to provide financial security in retirement. This potential opportunity has been destroyed.

These people have borne no responsibility for, nor had any control over these losses and are substantially stressed.

Other farming sectors having suffered disastrous losses e.g TB, Foot and Mouth disease, flooding. Such losses were addressed immediately.

Due to the halting of the initial Ash Die Back scheme and delay in introducing RUS on 10th June 2020, the farmer / forester has been left in limbo for at least six years, while the disease has been allowed to run riot.

We now need to move forward in a positive direction.

The inaction to date is having a detrimental effect on farmers considering engaging in forestry.

Farmer foresters are custodians for future generations and should be treated as having the potential to mitigate a lot of the climate problems. This needs to be recognised.

The solution to this Ash Die Back problem should be addressed as follow:

1. Consultation must involve engagement.

To date there has been a lack of engagement between the forest service and the farmer/ forester. Bearing in mind the farmer/ forester is the primary stakeholder.

2.The need to encompass ALL infected Ash plantations.

3.The RUS conditions need to be simplified so that the farmer/forester can progress with the process. i.e easily understood.

An e.g. the suggestion that NIS may have to be submitted at additional cost.

4. The costs incurred in removal of stumps and roots to be covered, especially in older plantations where costs are enormous due to size of stumps and roots.

5. Cost of replacing and replanting the trees.

6. This needs to be followed by at least 15 year premiums, plus an element to cover loss to date, not to mention the stress and trauma of this catastrophe.

7. The option to return the land to pasture.

THE REASON WHY OUR SUBMISSION TODAY NEEDS TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY:

- Farmer/foresters are climate custodians.
- There is no more efficient way of mitaging CO2 than planting trees.
- Plus the myriad of other benefits health, social, and ecological.
- The production of oxygen without which mankind will not survive.

FUTURE OF FORESTRY:

- If we want a forest industry in this country - address the Ash Die Back problem which is reducing confidence to zero.
- We must be taken seriously.

Finally we are cordially extending invitations to each member of the committee to visit infected sites.

Please contact us we will be happy to facilitate this.

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Simon White. Vice Chairman

John O'Connell.