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An Comhchoiste um Thalmhaíocht, Bia agus Muir
Tuarascáil Taistil – Cuairt ar Murray's Timber Group agus ar
Pháirc Foraoise Choillte, Co. na Gaillimhe
Nollaig 2023

Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Travel Report - Visit to Murray's Timber Group and Coillte
Forest Park, Co. Galway
December 2023

Membership

The following Deputies and Senators are members of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine of the 33rd Dáil Éireann and the 26th Seanad Éireann.



Sen. Victor Boyhan
Independent



Sen. Lynn Boylan
Sinn Féin



Jackie Cahill T.D.
Fianna Fáil
[Cathaoirleach]



Michael Collins T.D.
Independent



Sen. Paul Daly
Fianna Fáil



Michael Fitzmaurice T.D.
Independent



Joe Flaherty T.D.
Fianna Fáil



Paul Kehoe T.D.
Fine Gael



Claire Kerrane T.D.
Sinn Féin



Brian Leddin T.D.
Green Party



Sen. Tim Lombard
Fine Gael [Leas-
Chathaoirleach]



Johnny Mythen T.D.
Sinn Féin



Sen. Denis O'Donovan
Fianna Fáil



Michael Ring T.D.
Fine Gael

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Introduction

The Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine (“the Committee”) work programme includes the topic of ‘Forestry Policy and Strategy’. At a Committee meeting on this policy topic on the 1 March 2023, Coillte extended an invitation to the Committee to visit one of their forest parks. As part of the Committee’s pursuit of deeper knowledge and understanding in this field, the Committee agreed at a private meeting on 10 May 2023 to visit both Murray’s Timber Group’s sawmill in Co. Galway and Coillte’s Forest Park in Portumna, Co. Galway.

Committee Delegation (the “Delegation”)

The visit to the Sawmill and Forest Park was attended by the following members of the Committee:

- Jackie Cahill T.D., *Cathaoirleach*
- Michael Fitzmaurice T.D.
- Claire Kerrane T.D.
- Senator Paul Daly

The Delegation was accompanied by the Clerical Officer to the Committee, Ms. Rebecca Walsh.

Briefing

Murray’s Timber Group Sawmill, Co. Galway

On 13 June 2023, the Delegation first visited Murray’s Timber Sawmill at 10:30 a.m. and met with the following representatives of Murray’s Timber Group:

- Paddy Murray Snr
- Paddy Murray Jnr
- John Murray
- Ann Kelly of Vulcan Consulting
- Josh Byrne of Vulcan Consulting

The visit commenced with a tour of the sawmill where the Delegation was shown around the site, while Murray's Timber Group ("Murray's") explained the day-to-day operations of the sawmill. The Delegation was also shown the step-by-step process of how 2,300 tonnes of timber would pass through the mill in just one day.



Over the last 5 years Murray's has invested significant funds in the sawmill facility. While Murray's states that it is performing well in production, the plant is currently facing challenges such as staffing issues and stock supply. The difficulty with retaining staff is mainly due to the strenuous and intensive nature of the work involved to keep the facility operational on a 24-hour basis.

At times, due to the impact of Brexit and the departmental forestry licensing backlog, stock supply has caused major concern for those in Murray's. For instance, the sawmill has occasionally run out of Irish logs and has had to import them from Scotland to stay operational.



The representatives of Murray's believe that the process relating to the issuance of thinning forestry licenses should be withdrawn, as the representatives believe that this process is slowing down the issuance of felling forestry licenses. The Delegation found the visit to be an insightful and educational trip, and the Committee would like to extend its gratitude to Murray's.



Coillte Forest Park, Portumna Forest Park, Co. Galway

The Delegation then proceeded to Portumna Forest Park at 2pm and met with the following representatives from Coillte (“Coillte”) prior to the tour:

- Imelda Hurley (CEO),
- Mark Carlin (MD Coillte Forest),
- Aoife Donohoe (Group Communications Director),
- Mark O’Loughlin (Regional Manager),
- Gary Healy (Director of Regulatory Affairs)

The Delegation was then taken on a tour of the forest to see where some of the new forestry nurseries had been planted.



During the tour Coillte raised the following issues:

- The requirement to apply for various types of forestry licenses, and
- The failure to reach forestry planting targets in recent years.

Coillte explained that these issues will result in a shortage in timber and that the importation of timber will be required.

The Delegation heard that while Coillte's strategy of redesign, rewetting and rewilding has succeeded in introducing native species back into the forest, the deer population has hindered the progress. Coillte informed the Delegation that deer have been destroying newly planted trees, and while measures have been put in place to prevent the deer from getting into the nurseries, culling the number of deer in an organised fashion would be the best solution. Coillte suggested that a national culling programme should be evaluated, and if such a programme was implemented, it could help the forests to thrive.



Conclusion

In visiting both sites, the Delegation has gained a deeper understanding of the issues that must be tackled in the forestry sector, in order for it to reach its full potential in a manner that benefits all who work within it.

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

Powers of Select Committees (DSO 96 and SSO 72)

DSO 96

Unless the Dáil shall otherwise order, a Committee appointed pursuant to these Standing Orders shall have the following powers:

10. power to—

- (a) engage the services of persons with specialist or technical knowledge, to assist it or any of its sub-Committees in considering particular matters; and
- (b) undertake travel;

Provided that the powers under this paragraph are subject to such recommendations as may be made by the Working Group of Committee Chairmen under Standing Order 120(4)(a).

SSO 72

Unless the Seanad shall otherwise order, a Committee appointed pursuant to these Standing Orders shall have the following powers:

10. power to –

- (a) engage the services of persons with specialist or technical knowledge, to assist it or any of its sub-Committees in considering particular matters; and
- (b) undertake travel;

Provided that the powers under this paragraph are subject to such recommendations as may be made by the Working Group of Committee Chairmen under Standing Order 107(4)(a).

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