

Opening Statement on
“The threat of bark beetles to plantations”
to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the
Marine
17th January 2023

Chairperson and Committee members, I would like to thank you for the invitation to speak to you today on the threat of bark beetles to Irish forests, and how it aligns with Ireland’s plant health policy generally.

Promoting and safeguarding plant health is a key strategic principle of the Plant Health and Biosecurity Strategy 2020-2025. The strategy is underpinned by three key strategic principles: 1. Risk Anticipation, 2. Surveillance and 3. Awareness and it sets out the importance of plant health and biosecurity for Ireland as well as ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are aware of the risks to plant health in Ireland, and their role and responsibilities to reduce that risk. A mid term review of the strategy was published in December 2022.

Ireland is recognised as having a favourable plant health status and has the highest number of protected zones in the EU with 23 pests and diseases listed. A protected zone is a region in which a harmful organism which has established in one or more parts of the EU is not present in that region.

Ireland is a contracting party of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) of the United Nations, as well as an active member of the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO) and is cooperating with countries around the world developing global standards to protect plants.

The trade and movement of plants and plant products into and within the EU is governed by the EU Plant Health Regulation 2031 of 2016 and the Official Controls Regulations 625 of 2017. These Regulations harmonise the rules on the introduction of plants and plant products into the EU from countries outside the EU and the movement of plants and plant products within the EU. The EU Plant Health Regulatory Framework focuses particularly on the prevention of entry or spread of plant pests within the EU territory. It sets

out detailed rules for the early detection and eradication of Union quarantine pests if found present in the EU territory.

Within the EU, Ireland is a member of the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCOPAFF). This Committee, amongst other things, plays a key role in ensuring that European Union measures on plant health are practical and effective.

Ireland relies on trade as a principal source of economic growth. Yet plant pests know no borders and trade can facilitate the introduction and spread of plant pests. It is critical therefore that trade is facilitated in a way that minimizes phytosanitary risks.

Specifically in relation to bark beetles, Ireland has a number of **native** bark beetle species associated with coniferous tree species. These do not cause significant damage and are not a cause of concern.

There are a number of European bark beetle species of concern which are not currently present in Ireland. Within EU legislation, Ireland has Protected Zone status for the six **European** bark beetle species, recognising Ireland's freedom from these species currently and granting special protection against their potential introduction.

There is a very wide range of **non-European** bark beetles named within EU legislation. The Department announced₂ in December₂ the first findings in Ireland of *Pseudips mexicanus*₂ known as the Monterey Pine Engraver₂ in an area near Cratloe in Co. Clare.

The beetles were found in bark beetle traps, which have been used for many years as part of the Department's annual bark beetle surveys. No findings have been made in trees. This beetle is not thought to be a pest of economic significance for Ireland and its finding will not affect the movement of Irish spruce logs and timber and other non-pine species.

Coniferous roundwood is both imported into and exported out of Ireland by Irish industry. All imports into Ireland must be compliant with the EU Plant Health Regulation and importers must be registered as Professional Operators. Similarly, any action Ireland takes in response to threats from pests must also be compliant with EU Plant Health Regulations and the IPPC.

Importers in Ireland are prohibited from importing roundwood from areas known to be affected by quarantine bark beetle species. The only area internationally where imports into Ireland of coniferous roundwood with bark is permitted, is from a specific UK Government authority assigned 'Pest Free Area' (PFA) in the West of Scotland. There have been no findings of spruce bark beetles within the PFA. To maintain the PFA, the Scottish authorities carry out regular surveys for the beetles. These include - site inspections for timber due to be traded to the island of Ireland, pheromone lures located at timber handling sites, billet/pheromone traps located in and around the PFA and, bi-annual aerial surveys.

Imports of roundwood logs from this PFA in Scotland are subject to an inspection regime. This involves documentary, identity, and plant health physical checks at the port. All imports from the PFA must be accompanied by a Phytosanitary Certificate which is issued by the UK Government authority, in accordance with the IPPC, to attest that the logs meet the phytosanitary import requirements of Ireland and the EU and are in conformity with the certifying statement.

In addition, and in order to support the proof of origin of the roundwood from within the PFA, Phytosanitary Certificates provide identification of the specific forest location from which the roundwood is sourced. All documents associated with roundwood imports are inspected to verify the phytosanitary import requirements for the Protected Zone of Ireland are satisfied.

Inspections at the port involve sampling of logs from the shipment in accordance with a standard operational procedure. A sample of logs from various parts of the ship are brought to a safe examination area and are visually examined. Any beetles found are identified and any beetles found to date are beetles that are already present in Ireland and not of quarantine significance.

There are three ports where roundwood logs are imported into Ireland. These are Rushbrooke port and Passage West port in Co. Cork and Wicklow port. These three ports are designated Border Control Posts for roundwood logs where inspection facilities have been put in place.

As long as the Scottish authorities are in position to continue to demonstrate the area from which logs are being sourced is free from harmful organisms DAFM is bound to recognise this area freedom under the phytosanitary trading rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures SPS.

The Department has been and will continue to engage directly with Scottish forestry authorities, Northern Ireland and the European Commission to ensure that the pest free status of the island of Ireland is maintained.