

*Dé Máirt, 1 Deireadh Fómhair, 2019
Tuesday, 1st October, 2019*

2 p.m.

**GNÓ COMHALTAÍ PRÍOBHÁIDEACHA
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

Fógraí i dtaobh Leasú ar Thairiscint: Notice of Amendments to Motion

242. “That Dáil Éireann:

acknowledges:

- that Ireland has the second lowest forest cover in the European Union (EU) at 11 per cent, compared to a European average of 30 per cent and that the majority of the forests are monocultures;
- that the State forestry policy has been predominantly based on a rotation, clear-fell and replant cycle using monoculture;
- that the extent of hedgerows declined massively during the 20th century but has since recovered slightly;
- that having started from a forest cover of 1 per cent in 1923, the State and the forestry industry has grown substantially, and afforestation has brought major positive benefits including the development of a forestry sector and forest products industry that currently employs 12,000 people;
- that aspects of the current afforestation model, in particular the emphasis on large-scale monoculture have, in some cases, had negative impacts on local communities, biodiversity, water quality and landscapes;
- that in the light of the need to address the challenges of the climate and biodiversity emergency, now is the time to move to the next stage in Irish forestry;
- that it is desirable for the forestry system to provide a range of services in a way which strengthens local communities, provides employment for a new generation of foresters and access for the public to more varied woodlands, which are rich in biodiversity;
- that there is a potential for higher value, higher quality wood products from Irish forests, including a potential for long-lasting products as low carbon inputs for construction and other sectors and as stores of sequestered carbon for the lifetime of the buildings and products;
- the declining populations in certain rural areas, the high average age of farmers, and the developing crisis in Irish agriculture; and

- the inappropriate nature of current land use in many parts of Ireland, including the inability to make a living from current farming models and the difficulty for young people who might want to work on the land to get access to land which they do not directly inherit;

notes:

- the impacts of biodiversity loss and the loss of ecosystem services, and the consequent economic losses and risks we face globally and in Ireland;
- the gravity of the global biodiversity crisis, including the loss of species, the loss of important populations of species and the undermining of ecosystem services;
- the vital role of land use in the hydrological cycle, managing flooding and drought, maintaining water quality and dealing with pollution and the role which changed land use practices must play in meeting the objectives of improving water quality in line with the EU Water Framework Directive;
- the vulnerability of even-aged monoculture plantations, e.g. to disease, fire and windthrow, especially given the increasing dangers of climate change;
- the role which changed land use practices must play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in sequestering and storing carbon, and in providing resilience to the effects of climate change;
- the essential role that afforestation, land use and soil carbon management must play in Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) 2021-2030, which is to be drafted by the end of this year; and
- the commitments Ireland has entered into, in the context of the Natura 2000 network and the EU Birds and Habitats Directives to protect habitats and species, and the fact that Ireland is failing to meet those commitments and that biodiversity loss is continuing, as demonstrated in Ireland's reports under Article 16 of the EU Birds and Habitats Directive;

agrees:

- that Ireland was once covered by great forests and that our mild climate and the influence of the Gulf Stream make for one of the best habitats for trees in the world;
- that the Irish population wants to spend more time in nature and the public health benefits of enabling them to do so;
- the economic value of ecotourism and associated economic activities; and
- that the success of rewilding initiatives in other countries, and the plans for a recognised wilderness area in the Nephin range, as well as Coillte's recent recognition of the amenity value of forestry in the Dublin and Wicklow mountains; and

calls on the Government to:

- make a fundamental change in forestry policy away from a narrow vision of 30 year cycle to a permanent woodland approach that would provide greater and more diverse social, environmental and economic benefits to society as a whole;
- move away from large-scale monoculture of fast-growing species such as Sitka spruce on 'marginal land' towards mixed, diverse forestry, with a wider range of forest types (short rotation, longer rotations, agroforestry, semi-wild) delivering a range of services and benefits and forest products;
- rebalance the premiums and payments made for planting and thinning to support this strategic change in Irish forestry;
- start the restoration of large areas of natural woodlands, formerly the dominant terrestrial ecosystems of Ireland, including the productive use of much of them

- through a system of continuous cover and close to nature forestry;
- begin a national programme of transformation of existing young, even-aged monoculture forests to continuous cover forestry;
 - implement the recommendation of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Climate Action, accepted and endorsed by the Dáil on 9th May, for a review of land use to inform a national land use plan;
 - establish a system of local forestry plans, developed in an open participative process including all parts of civil society, in each county, informed by the national land-use plan, which would form the framework for Government support for small-scale afforestation in the county;
 - use Strategic Environmental Assessment to develop these local forestry plans, to ensure the meeting of objectives, including carbon sequestration, water quality and hydrology, biodiversity protection and restoration, landscape and public amenity;
 - provide for these local forestry plans to include financial support for small-scale afforestation with mixed woodland with a high proportion of native species in all parts of the country;
 - provide budgetary support to enable every registered farm holding to plant a hectare of natural woodland on their land within the next five years, on agreed sites within the farm which minimise the effect on farm operations and maximise the biodiversity and ecosystem service benefits;
 - develop opportunities for community ownership of and community investment in afforestation within national forestry policy and local forestry plans;
 - reorient national supports and incentives for afforestation in line with the local forestry plans in the direction of forestry closer to nature;
 - provide better support for the restoration and planting of new hedgerows to provide biodiversity corridors, carbon shelters and nutrients in our agricultural system;
 - engage local authorities and local communities in a radical expansion of urban tree planting and neighbourhood and community forests and for urban trees and forests;
 - resource the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Council for Forest Research and Development (COFORD) and forestry non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at a level appropriate for them to carry out all of their functions and develop new areas of responsibility;
 - review the objectives and legal structure of Coillte to establish a new mandate for the company which delivers multiple benefits from forestry, including environmental and community objectives as well as the production of high-quality timber;
 - establish better educational infrastructure and funding to support apprenticeship programmes in forest management in line with the new forestry policy;
 - increase investment in higher and further education and training as well as for the modernisation of equipment available for craft apprenticeship provision to conduct such a transformation of existing strands; and
 - promote the use of high-quality wood materials in new building construction, including by amending building regulations, and to encourage Irish enterprise agencies to further support the development of local enterprises which develop a wide range of products to use natural wood material.” — *Eamon Ryan, Catherine Martin.*

Leasú:

Amendments:

1. To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“notes:

- the extent of forestry development achieved over the last number of decades, through the combination of State funding and participation of the private landowners in the State’s afforestation programmes;
- the findings from the third cycle of the National Forest Inventory, that the national forest estate is still expanding and has now reached 11 per cent of the total land area, with a wide variety of forest types present and that share of broadleaf species in the national forest estate is 29 per cent;
- the multi-functional benefits of forestry including environmental, social and economic;
- the contribution which the sector makes to the rural economy through the provision of 12,000 jobs;
- the Government’s commitment to tackling climate change as contained in the ‘Climate Action Plan 2019 To Tackle Climate Breakdown’, and the ambitious targets set for the agriculture, forestry and land use sector therein, including an afforestation target of 8,000 hectares per annum;
- that meeting the afforestation target is challenging and that it will require a collaborative response from Government, private land owners, public bodies and local communities;
- that the enhancements following the 2018 Midterm Review (MTR) of the Government’s Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020, including increased grant and premium rates, have directly led to an increase in the proportion of broadleaf trees planted in Ireland, including a 25 per cent increase last year compared to the previous year;
- that significant increases for planting of agro-forestry were introduced in the MTR with premium rates trebled;
- that initiatives by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine include the introduction, in January 2019, of three new support measures to further support biodiversity in Irish forests, including a scheme to support Continuous Cover Forestry, and changes to the Woodland Improvement Scheme to introduce grant aid to carry out a second thinning intervention for broadleaf forests;
- that afforestation applications are subject to detailed scrutiny regarding environmental suitability, including site inspections, statutory referrals, public consultation, and the application of procedures around Appropriate Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment;
- that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine operates a range of afforestation-related protocols in the context of the Natura 2000 network and the European Union Birds and Habitats Directive to protect habitats and species; and
- that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine provides support, through schemes such as the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) and under the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020, to landowners to undertake actions and measures which support and enhance biodiversity; and

recognises:

- the role that hedgerows play in nature-based solutions to both mitigate climate change (carbon sequestration and storage) and help in the creation of landscape resilience in the face of climate change, and notes that 6,758 kilometres of new hedgerows have been established since the introduction of agri-environmental schemes in 1994;

- the funding provided under the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine NeighbourWood Scheme to local authorities and other landowners, both public and private, to create ‘close-to-home’ woodland amenities in partnership with communities, for local people to use and enjoy;
- the growing interest in planting native woodlands under the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 is increasing steadily year on year with 374 hectares of native woodlands planted in 2018, an increase of 38 per cent compared to 2017, and this upward trend has continued into 2019 which is ahead of the 2018 planting figure year to date;
- that under the Woodland Improvement Scheme which promotes active management of broadleaf forest, almost 680 hectares of woodlands received support under this scheme this year, this represents a 76 per cent increase in activity when compared to the same time in 2018;
- that support for Continuous Cover Forestry was introduced for the first time in the MTR of the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020, where funding was allocated for 30 projects up until the end of 2020;
- the establishment by Coillte of a specific entity ‘Coillte Nature’ within the company to focus on the environment and recreational forests, with Coillte Nature to target the delivery of new woodlands facilitating species diversity, biodiversity and carbon sequestration as part of the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020;
- that Coillte Nature will be undertaking large discrete projects with a separate non-commercial focus, with the intention of increasing the national forest estate but with a strong emphasis on carbon sequestration, species diversification, biodiversity and the development of outdoor recreation and tourism amenities;
- that the National Council for Forest Research and Development (COFORD) proposes to track the implementation of the recommendations in ‘Forests, products and people – Ireland’s forest policy – a renewed vision’ and to monitor and report on progress in implementing the stated strategic actions and to engage and influence stakeholders in relation to policy changes and developments focusing on afforestation and the promotion of forestry; and
- that the continued support of members of the House will be required for the ongoing development of forestry in order to maximise the range of benefits for the economy, society and the environment.” — *An tAire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara.*

2. To insert the following after “develop new areas of responsibility;”:

- “— provide for planning permission for all forestry developments over five hectares;” — *Martin Kenny, Gerry Adams, John Brady, Pat Buckley, Seán Crowe, David Cullinane, Pearse Doherty, Dessie Ellis, Martin Ferris, Kathleen Funchion, Mary Lou McDonald, Denise Mitchell, Imelda Munster, Jonathan O'Brien, Eoin Ó Broin, Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire, Louise O'Reilly, Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Maurice Quinlivan, Brian Stanley.*