

Forestry Policy Group Meeting
20 January 2022
14:30 by Webex

Attendance:

DAFM: Minister of State Pippa Hackett, B Gleeson (Secretary General), C Hayes (Asst Secretary General), B Delany (Director of Forestry), S Dunne, P Kelly, K Collins, F Moore, A Maguire, S Maurus, A Cunningham, G Izabelle, J Farrell, C Smith, S O'Mahony, J Casey, C Murphy, S O'Sullivan, E O'Doherty, S Hona

Chairs of Project Woodland Working Groups: M Layde, M Crowe, T Hennessy, M Cantwell

Stakeholders: M McAuley (FII), M Carlin (Coillte), M Boyden (SWAN), D Houlihan (AIFC), D Whelan (ITGA), J Roche (NPWS), T Ryan (None so Hardy), B Murphy (FII), E Hendrick (COFORD), V Nally (IFA), P Fogarty (Irish Wildlife Trust), K O'Donoghue (FOCS), M Conway (FII), A Dunne (ACA), P Purser (Pro Silva), N Ni Fhlatharta, (Teagasc), E McGoff (An Taisce), L Lennon (Irish Rural Link), M Moroney (FCI), N Sweetman (IFO)

Presenting: Larry Ryan (Behaviour & Attitudes Ltd.)

Apologies: A St Ledger (Environmental Pillar), O Duggan (Birdwatch Ireland), B Hyde (EPA), J Gowran (Woodlands of Ireland), P Barry (IGBC)

Minister Hackett opened the meeting, welcomed all attendees, including the 4 Chairs of the Project Woodland (PW) Working Groups (WGs). Minister Hackett:

- Noted that she is very hopeful for the year ahead and thinks that 2022 will be the year in which we will see material and positive results from Project Woodland.
- Thanked members for the time and effort they have put into PW, stating that she believes the entire project will come together this year to deliver on shared objectives.
- Gave an update on licencing given its pivotal role in afforestation and the harvesting of timber. In 2021 a 56% increase on output in 2020 was achieved with 2,877 felling licences issued for nearly 8.5 million cubic metres of timber, 264 kilometres of forest roads and around 4,000 hectares of afforestation were also licensed.
- Reiterated that licence output needs to be better, especially in terms of afforestation and the priority for 2022 is to increase the number of afforestation licences issued, while maintaining output on roads and felling. A licencing plan is currently being developed for 2022 and will be shared with members next week. Mention was made of the 5,000 hectares of licenced land available to plant
- Referenced that the pilot for pre-application discussions is already underway and that while DAFM intends making an additional payment at forestry establishment stage, a feasibility study of Working Group 4's proposal for the environmental grant will be carried out in the next several weeks.
- Announced that the Frost Scheme has opened to offer financial support to affected forest owners and their foresters in respect of frost events which occurred in May 2019, 2020 and 2021.
- Addressed the consultation process on the new Forest Strategy and the important public engagements planned for early 2022. Behaviour and Attitudes Ltd. carried out a public attitudes survey on forestry which will provide a lot of very valuable information for the development of the Strategy. The survey highlights a clear need for more communication because it found that 7 in 10 Irish adults said they didn't notice anything about forests or

woodlands in any media over the past year. This is something that will be addressed with a serious level of public engagement in 2022.

- Committed to the implementation of the outcomes of PW remaining a priority in 2022.

Presentation by Brendan Gleeson, Secretary General, DAFM, Chair of Project Board (PB), Project Woodland. B Gleeson:

- Echoed Minister Hackett's belief that 2022 is the year in which we hope to deliver substantially under PW. The PM has been asked to give milestones and end dates. Although these may need to be adjusted it is important for everyone to see when PW will end. DAFM will allocate resources needed to make it a success as well as examining processes and training needs.
- Noted the work on the Licensing plan for 2022 and stated that targets will be a priority as will outcomes of PW. The role of FPG members and DAFM in the new Forestry Strategy and Programme is critical. A voluntary Carbon code is currently being examined which will aim to reward farmers.
- Mentioned that the Regulatory Review is particularly timely in light of court decisions, a review of planning laws by the Attorney General and a review of guidance on AA led by NPWS. Philip Lee have met with all WGs and meetings with stakeholders can be facilitated.
- Acknowledged that communication is key and PB members have made themselves available to all WGs and communications have improved. A wider communications strategy is being put in place to highlight the benefits of forestry to landowners.
- Remains optimistic for year ahead, looking forward to working closely with the WGs.
- Concluded by thanking members for their time and effort and stating that no institutional resistance to change exists in DAFM. Officials are not opposed in principle to change and are working to a common objective.

Presentation by Larry Ryan, Behaviour and Attitudes Ltd.

Behaviour and Attitudes Ltd. carried out a public attitudes survey on forestry of 1,000 people over the age of 16 in Ireland. Larry Ryan, the Director of B&A, presented an overview on the initial results of the survey. In summary:

- Most of the people surveyed live in close proximity to forestry, 42% within 5km with those in urban areas as close on average as those in the countryside.
- General attitudes to forestry are very positive with 3 out of 4 wanting to see more forests in their county and more planting of trees in urban areas.
- Forests are felt to be an important part of the rural landscape for the vast majority of people with a slightly greater preference for broadleaf trees over conifer.
- 58% have visited a forest in the past year, more rural, but half of visitors to forests go to urban forests. 50% would not make changes although some suggest adding toilets, better access and signage.
- Middle aged and middle-class adults and those with young kids more likely to have visited a forest, over 50s are generally the most frequent visitors.
- Exercise and Recreation is the key driver of visits, but other benefits are seen including addressing climate change, mental health, enhancement to air quality and contribution to habitats for plants and wildlife.
- 88% feel forestry benefits their local community. Contribution to the economy is apparent but is less top of mind for people.
- 10% live in a wood-built house but a quarter more of the population would like to.

Presentation by Dr Matt Crowe, Chair of Working Group 2- A Shared National Approach, Project Woodland.

- Reminded the Group why we are here, also highlighting the fact that if we don't plant more trees, it will be hard to meet climate targets.
- Update on the Focus of WG2 including the Shared Vision.
- Updated the Group on Public and Stakeholder Consultations as divided into Bucket A – the unvarnished truth - and Bucket B – deliberative and informed input to Shared National Vision.
- The new Forest Strategy will deliver a vision for the next 50-100 years and the new Forestry Programme will align with it. It must be implementable (i.e. focusing on the what, who, how and when and a manageable number of key strategic actions) and deal decisively with long standing barriers to progress and policy conflicts.
- Showed how the Group intend to progress from Framework to Strategy including the deconstruction of Scenario 3 and the draft Vision Statement Action to allow the Group to progress from aspiration to reality. For their next steps, the Group will continue with the rollout of the public and stakeholder consultations on the draft Vision and develop a first cut of a strategic action plan to discuss with the PB and then with the FPG, DAFM staff and other key stakeholders.
- Timelines are currently end of April-May for Strategy but at next FPG meeting it may be possible to present a draft.



WG2 update to
FPG- january 2022.p

Presentation by Michael Layde, Chair of Working Group 4 - Process Improvement, Project Woodland.

- Workstreams of the Group include a Business Process Analysis, Regulatory Review, Pre-Application Discussions, Environment Report/Grant and Longer-Term Solutions.
- Business Process Analysis - work on the complementary systems analysis has been made available to DAFM, but not yet to the Group and they would like a substantive update for the next meeting.
- Regulatory Review is well underway, and the Group are interacting with a representative from Philip Lee which is very helpful. No silver bullets but there are things we can do better. The Regulatory Review is pivotal to all the work being undertaken as part of PW.
- Pre-Application Discussions – pilot scheme is now live, more districts may be added and the WG will be fully involved in the review.
- Environment Report/Grant –the Scheme is being introduced by DAFM, but the process is different to that proposed by the WG. The Group welcomes commitment from the PB to ensure a timeline is prepared for consideration of the feasibility of the Group's original proposals. Timing of the payment of grant is key.
- Longer Term Solutions - Business Process Analysis and Regulatory Review together should permit the Group to arrive at recommendations for both early administrative improvements to the licensing system and potentially more invasive changes requiring legislation.



WG4 FPG Update
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Presentation by Professor Thia Hennessy, Chair of Working Group 3, Organisational Development and Communications, Project Woodland.

- Remit and objectives of WG3 include Organisational Development (review of DAFM organisational structure, roles, responsibilities and capabilities, conduct a training needs analysis, suite of KPI's and targets to be developed, published and reported to Minister quarterly, Customer Charter to be developed and published) and Communications (agreement with forestry representatives on combined approach to promotion of sustainable forestry)
- Training Needs Analysis (TNA) consultancy project gone to tender, and work should commence in February. Education and importance of forestry to young people in 2nd and 3rd level is crucial.
- DAFM Organisational Review – Terms of Reference and project governance agreed. Review to be launched at a consultation with all DAFM staff and the tender process will commence ASAP.
- Early Draft Communications Strategy being prepared with key objectives, target audiences and main messages agreed. There is overlap with WG2 so a meeting will be scheduled to discuss.
- Review of the website and work on a new version has begun with the new pages to be reviewed in mid-February.
- Review of respective roles and capabilities of Coford, Teagasc and Coillte has yet to progress, but initial meetings have been held. Need to progress to defining scope and objectives.
- Next steps include meeting TNA consultants and appointment of consultants to conduct DAFM Organisational Review while ensuring coherence between these and the Regulatory Review. Agree communications strategy and website, progress the cross-organizational review and finalise Customer Charter once process review is complete and feasible timelines are agreed.
- Members have echoed frustration at pace and interdependencies are an issue. If WG3 can get the Organisational Review and TNA kicked off it will help.



WG3 FPG
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Presentation by Michael Cantwell, Chair of Working Group 1 - Reducing the Backlog, Project Woodland

- Objectives of WG1 are to reduce the current backlog of all types of licence to an acceptable level, whilst ensuring that regulatory standards are maintained and to ensure that any future growth of a backlog is identified and managed expeditiously.
- The Group have met on 22 occasions.
- Key issues in progress include the Regulatory Review, backlog processing target, afforestation license approvals and licence approvals dashboard.
- Philip Lee will present to WG1 next Tuesday on the review. The WG are particularly interested in 2 items – 15km screening and single consent.

- Backlog processing target – WG asked DAFM a few months ago for the plan to reduce backlog in 2022 and there is frustration in Group at how long it is taking to get this and they look forward to receiving it next week.
- Dashboard has been mainly positive, there was a fall over Christmas but has gone back up. Over 20 afforestation licences issued in one week recently and the WG would ask for that to be maintained.
- Licencing report – will be made available to all FPG members shortly. It shows the total number of licences and total in backlog. The trend shows this has come down from 5,100 to 3,500 so there is an overall reduction in number of files in backlog and it is essential that it continue. It is also essential to see the plan next week for the reduction of the backlog. WG will take on board the plan and ask DAFM how they can be achieved.



WG1 update to FPG
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Summary of topics raised and clarifications given during the meeting:

- Survey results:
 - Survey results show that people have no prejudices in relation to the tree species and forestry should be considered a part of the agricultural landscape, complementing the farming income.
 - Issue of dichotomy between forestry and agriculture was raised. Forestry should be more integrated with CAP. DAFM acknowledged that a separate discussion needs to be had about forestry as part of the farm enterprise and how we can all work together to increase the appetite for landowners to plant.
 - A member noted that perhaps the survey shows that we have the type of forestry we need, 6.5million broadleaf trees have dispatched from a member's nursery each year for last 10 years.
 - Concern expressed that less than 5% of the survey recipients are farmers. Is it possible to segregate their answers in order to see how they feel towards forestry? L Ryan confirmed that farmers are part of the 'rural' component in the survey and a further distinction could be made in their report.
- Licencing:
 - A member had a concern about the Minister stating that the Felling Backlog was all but cleared and that there is a cultural aversion to planting trees. Minister Hackett said her aim is to be positive about forestry.
 - Messaging on afforestation needs to change as farmers have disengaged and some landowners will not plant as they have concerns about whether a felling licence will be granted when their trees are ready to harvest. DAFM agreed that the message being sent by the Department and the Forestry Sector is key here.
 - Concern expressed that DAFM's interpretation of the Habitats Directive is erroneous. It was confirmed that the Regulatory Review is examining this.
 - Will the target plan for 2022 be broken down by Scheme? DAFM confirmed that it will.
- Project Board and Working Groups:

- Philip Lee should engage with stakeholders more.
- Delay in the release of the 1st report by the Business Analyst being issued to the WGs.
- Frustration expressed at pace of progress with PW, particularly with the difference in the Environment Report/Grant introduced by DAFM compared to what the WG proposed.
- Important that applicants are also included in Pre-Application Discussions, not just the Registered Forester.

Minister Hackett concluded the meeting by thanking all participants, acknowledging that there has been some positive progress which wouldn't have been possible without PW and we now need to continue to build momentum. The next meeting is due to take place in March.

END