

CAP Rural Development Division
Agriculture House
Kildare Street

Re: Input to CAP Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027

9 December 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

Project Woodland was established by Minister Hackett in February 2021 to respond to the issues identified in McKinnon and O'Hara Reports on the forestry sector in Ireland. A key deliverable from Project Woodland is the development of a Shared National Approach and Vision for the role of trees, woods and forests in Ireland's future and a Forest Strategy to implement this approach and vision.

This short submission has been prepared by Project Woodland Working Group 2, which has been charged with the role of advancing both the Vision and the Strategy. The Vision and Strategy work is due to be completed by April 2022 so that both can be incorporated for implementation into the new National Forestry Programme. The Working Group felt that it would be useful to make a high level contribution to the CAP Strategic Plan process even though work on the Vision and Strategy is not yet complete as there are a number of cross-cutting issues worthy of consideration in ensuring policy coherence between agriculture and forestry. The Group feels that it is crucially important that agriculture and forestry move forward over the next decade in a way that is mutually supportive and harmonious as they share the same overarching objectives of building a more environmentally, economically, socially and culturally sustainable Ireland. We therefore ask that you note the following:

- While forestry is funded by state aid and not directly funded in Ireland through CAP measures, it is worth noting that a thriving and growing forestry sector will deliver on the three general CAP objectives, namely:
 - (i) to foster a smart, competitive, resilient and diversified agricultural sector ensuring long term food security;
 - (ii) to support and strengthen environmental protection, including biodiversity, and climate action, and to contribute to achieving the environmental- and climate-related objectives of the Union, including its commitments under the Paris Agreement;
 - (iii) to strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas.
- Forestry will contribute to all three of these general CAP objectives and conversely, these objectives are less likely to be met without a thriving and growing forestry sector in Ireland fully supported by Irish farmers and other landowners who are in a position to plant and manage trees and forests for the multiple economic, environmental and social benefits that they can provide.
- Forestry is a significant and sustainable diversification option for farmers and a thriving and growing forestry sector will significantly strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas. Objective ii) is highly unlikely to be successfully met without a thriving and growing forestry sector, in particular the climate-related objectives, given forestry's crucial role as a carbon sink.

- The Forestry sector in Ireland is not in a good place at the moment with afforestation rates far below the already relatively modest target for new afforestation set out in the Climate Action Plan.
- If we don't collectively work out how to grow a lot more of the right trees in the right places for the right reasons with the right management then we are far less likely to meet national objectives for climate and biodiversity, and we will also fail to capitalise on opportunities for more home-grown timber in construction, greater public access to healthy outdoor environments, economically viable diversification options for farmers and creating new and sustainable employment in rural areas.
- Significant opportunities exist from our existing private forests planted by over 23,000 farmers. The volume of timber harvested will rise from 4 million cubic meters this year to over 6 million cubic metres by 2030, creating massive opportunities for climate, employment and replacing materials made from non-renewable resources.
- The proposed Shared National Vision for forests and forestry in Ireland (attached as Appendix A) has a high level of ambition, and addresses the multiple benefits that can flow from forestry including diversification opportunities for farmers. It paints a picture of a very different Ireland that will only happen through increasing levels of afforestation on land currently used for other purposes, mainly grass for dairy/beef and tillage.
- There are many ways in which a farmer can engage with forestry - commercial softwood plantations, continuous cover forestry, agroforestry, native woodlands, hedgerow expansion, orchards, individual tree planting, riparian planting .
- The next CAP Strategic Plan for the period 2023 - 2027 should therefore have as a key objective facilitating and encouraging the majority of Irish farmers to find the right type of forestry, no matter what scale, for their farm, and ensure that the financial incentives through Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 make it easier for farmers to choose forestry in whatever form works for them. With this in mind, we particularly welcome the proposal 'to introduce a Pillar 1 Eco-Scheme "for all farmers" with the objective being to 'maximise farmer participation to achieve climate and environmental improvements across all farmed lands.' This Eco-Scheme for all farmers could and should include tree planting and afforestation options for farmers and be an integral part of the scheme. For example, this could be the perfect opportunity to grow the concept of agroforestry amongst Irish farmers which is specifically designed to co-exist with other farming practices and land uses. We also welcome the proposal for 30% of a land parcel to be eligible without being in agricultural production is very positive and could allow new forest and woodland to develop in these areas. We also consider it very important that there be a clear signal to farmers that they will not be penalised for having scrub woodland or forestry on their land and that, in fact, they will be rewarded through a form of ecosystem services support for having such a habitat as an integral and valued part of the farm.
- Due to the different incentive and grant support models for agriculture and forestry, it is particularly important that all CAP supports through both Pillars 1 and 2 are forestry proofed to protect against any unintended barriers to afforestation arising from the design of CAP incentives and supports. Put simply, if we want more farmers to plant more trees then we need to make sure that the CAP payments and supports make it easier for this to happen even if they are not the primary vehicle for grant aid.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to share these observations with you. As the work on the Forest Vision and Strategy develops we are very happy to engage further with you to ensure

that we end up with strong and effective policy coherence between agriculture and forestry that will facilitate increasing afforestation levels in Ireland in a way that works for farmers and other land owners.

Yours sincerely, and on behalf of Project Woodland Working Group 2

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the chairperson.

Chairperson Working Group 2

Appendix A - Draft Shared National Vision for 2050 for Trees, Woods and Forests in Ireland's Future

THE RIGHT TREES IN THE RIGHT PLACES FOR THE RIGHT REASONS WITH THE RIGHT MANAGEMENT SUPPORTING A SUSTAINABLE AND THRIVING ECONOMY AND SOCIETY AND A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT.

By 2050, Ireland's forests and woodlands will be seen as a symbol of the transformational social, economic and environmental changes that were needed to address the climate, biodiversity, housing and health emergencies of the 2020's. A much larger and more diverse forestry and woodland footprint is being successfully managed to balance and deliver forestry's multiple objectives and benefits for climate, nature, wood production, people, the wider economy and rural communities. It is co-existing in harmony with farming, urban and other landscapes and valued highly by citizens. It is also supporting a thriving and growing forest industry, long term quality employment, ecosystem services and public, educational and recreational amenities.

Forestry is at the centre of the circular and green economy with Irish grown timber the material of choice for new Irish homes. It is providing a profitable diversification option for farmers, with people living in rural, urban and suburban communities feeling a sense of connection and pride in their local forests and woodlands, and the many benefits that they provide. Legacy environmental issues associated with past forestry practices have been successfully resolved, building on the improvements in management evident under the 2014-2020 Forestry Programme. The Irish landscape now features a rich variety of trees, woods and forests, established for multiple purposes and delivering multiple benefits for the environment, economy and society on both public and private land.