



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Project Woodland

Project Board

Interim Report No. 4

August 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The Project Woodland Board is pleased to present its latest Interim Report covering the continued implementation of Project Woodland up to August 2022. The purposes are to (1) provide the Board's feedback across the scope of Project Woodland, (2) ensure Working Groups and stakeholders are apprised of developments, and (3) inform and make recommendations to the Minister on next steps.

The Project Board gratefully acknowledges all feedback received on its previous reports and submissions/recommendations from Working Groups. The Project board evaluates recommendations and priorities for implementation based on anticipated benefit having regard to the scale of work involved and getting best use of resources available.

SUMMARY ACHIEVEMENTS & PROGRESS

There has been continued, notable progress on the implementation of Project Woodland summarised below:

- Significant progress has been made in **reducing the backlog** with a reduction from the start of 2022 of 3,700 applications on hand > 120 days to **1,875** as of 2nd September 2022. However, afforestation licensing remains behind target and further additional work to address recent blockages is underway. The Board notes the substantial increase in ecology resources, process improvements and training expected to yield significantly increased output in the coming months. Progress is also noted on greater transparency on license application status for applicants.
- The **Environment Report Grant (ERG)** has been sanctioned by DPER and payments commenced at Form 2 stage on July 12th with 61 payments paid to date.
- Following a successful pilot, DAFM is finalising SOPs for a nationwide rollout of the **Pre-Application Discussion (PAD)** to improve the accuracy and efficiency of processing applications.
- The **Independent Regulatory Review** for Afforestation, Roads & Felling has been concluded and has been considered by the Project Board in discussion with the relevant WGs. The review was unable to identify a single or straightforward solution, however it offers a suite of options that have the potential to simplify the process and to bring greater certainty as regards likely timing and conditions of licensing application outcomes. The report is currently being evaluated and an action plan responding to the recommendations is being drawn up by DAFM.
- DAFM has compiled a report on the **Shared National Vision for Forestry 2050** following extensive public consultation through a Citizens Deliberative Dialogue, Public

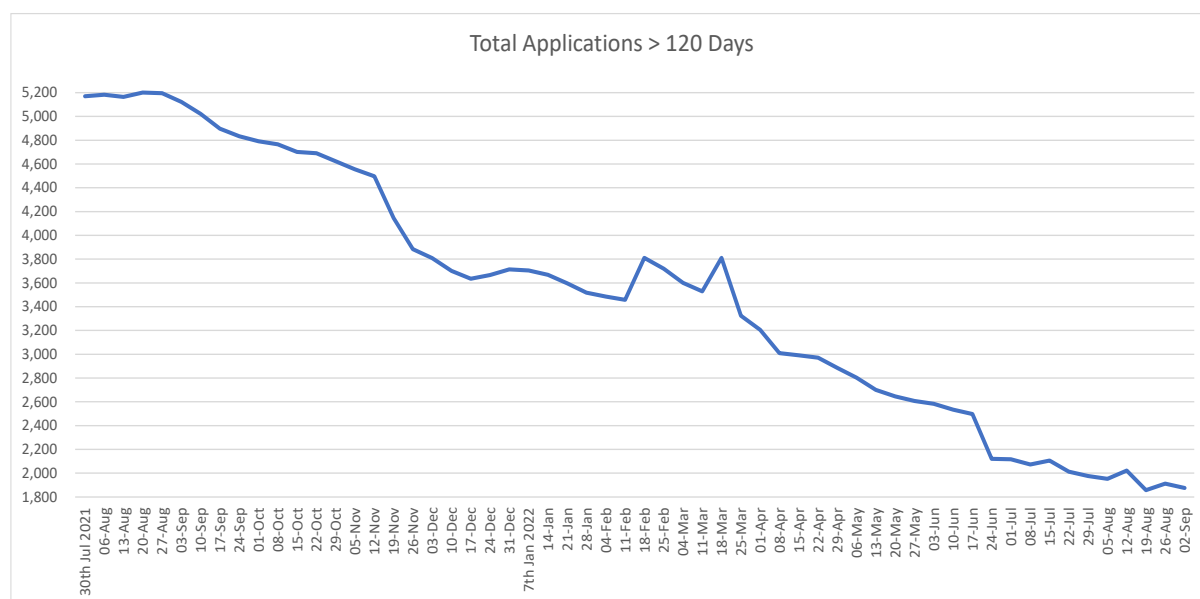
Attitudes Survey, Irish Rural Link questionnaires, a Youth Forum, an Online Survey and Bilateral Consultations with key stakeholders.

- Work is well advanced on the **Forestry Strategy** to deliver the vision, as one of the principal outputs/objectives from the original Mackinnon recommendations with publication due in Q3.
- ARUP will conduct the **SEA/AA for the Implementation Plan and Forest Strategy** as required before final publication. Work has commenced on the technical elements.
- Responses to the **Organisation Review** tender received and DAFM will evaluate and select a suitable applicant with an outline estimate of 3 months to complete. This will have regard to possible learnings from the Legal & Regulatory review.
- **Training Needs Analysis** commenced by Auxilia consultants and will run for 9 weeks.
- First draft of the **Customer Charter** completed and will take inputs from WG4 on timelines in developing the appropriate response times for license applications.
- Significant work has commenced on implementation of the **Communications Plan** with conferences/workshops held at Oakpark April 13th and in Athlone May 11th to enable better communications and promotion initiatives with cross-industry stakeholders including DAFM, Teagasc, COFORD, Coillte, IFA, Irish Forest Owners, GAA, ITGA, WFC, SWS, The Acorn Project and other members from the workgroups.
- The on-going **Business Systems and Process** review is working closely with the Agile Implementation Group to implement new process and systems improvements with 12 items completed and a further 10 in progress.
- Project Woodland is now entering its final stage and planning has commenced for the implementation of a new forest strategy and forestry programme to include structures needed to support this implementation. Making our shared national vision a reality will require multi-stakeholder support and collaboration building on the achievements to date through Project Woodland.
- We are therefore entering a period of transition as we move from the specific objectives of Project Woodland to the implementation of an ambitious shared vision for the role of trees, woods and forests in Ireland's future.

LICENSING OUTPUTS

Progress continues in reducing the **Backlog of licensing applications**. Further modernisation of the processes around iNET/iFORIS is taking place and the AA Assist software has been successfully implemented for afforestation applications. The number of Licences on hand > 120 days continues to decline and is down from 3,700 at the start of 2022 to 1,875. The downward trend is illustrated below. Good progress is evident in most categories achieving 94% of target against plan, with the exception of Afforestation Licensing which remains behind target in H1, 2022. The Project Board has asked for greater focus on afforestation to address remaining blockages, noting the increased resources in that area to deliver substantially more output in Q3.

BACKLOG (APPLICATION AGED OVER 120 DAYS)



The Board monitors outputs across felling, forest roads and afforestation and DAFM continues to invest in resources which has had a positive impact. DAFM has committed to providing a quarterly update indicating progress to provide clarity on the Licensing Plan and to allow monitoring of the key performance indicators. The **Forestry Licensing Plan 2022 Quarter 2** update is available at [gov.ie - Forestry Licensing Plan 2022 \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie - Forestry Licensing Plan 2022 (www.gov.ie))

PROJECT STATUS

The following tables indicate the summary status and outstanding items to be completed by the year end for this phase of Project Woodland. Using a rating system of 1-5 to indicate progress to date on meeting the objectives & outputs, the project is approximately 70% complete. A significant number of key tasks and objectives are close to finishing to meet the original recommendations outlined in the Mackinnon report. By necessity, some items will transfer into the new forestry strategy and programme in 2023. The Project Board will make recommendations on the transition to the new Forestry Programme 2023 and the appropriate implementation strategy.

Project Status versus Objectives and Outcomes

The following tables show an assessment on the progress for each of the work groups and progress to date.

(Ratings - 1 Started/Planning, 2 Meetings/Workshops, 3 Analysis/Design, 4 Implement/Deliver, 5 Completed signed off)

WG1- Reduce Backlog	Scope: address recommendation 2 Backlog to cover all applications licenses for roads, afforestation and felling that have been in the system longer than agreed target processing times. A clear definition of 'backlog' will be recommended by the group.	Status	Rating 1-5
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reduce current backlog of License applications for Afforestation, Roads and Felling.	Backlog has been reduced by 64% and process in place for further reduction. However, more progress needed on Afforestation licencing.	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Agree and publish definition of 'backlog.'	Done.	5

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose early warning indicators such that any future backlog can be identified and managed expeditiously. 	The licensing plan and reporting systems monitor performance versus targets and will highlight any trends in licensing / backlogs that need attention.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with WG4 as to (a) business process review being undertaken and (b) regulatory/legal review. 	Regulatory Review complete. DAFM is drafting an action plan in response to the regulatory review.	3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with Business Systems Analysis work. 	The Business Systems Analysis team are working closely with the Agile Implementation Group to specify process improvements with 12 components already implemented to date including Application Tracker to enable applicants to track the progress of their applications, improved Business Information Reports to provide up to date and timely data for management and an Ecology Tracking System to monitor and track progress for inspections. There are a further 11 systems improvements at the development stage.	5
Principal Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targets for backlog to be agreed and incorporated into the Customer 	WG1 will make recommendations and the final	4

	<p>Charter (WG3). Includes consideration of how to segregate real backlog from batch applications for scheduled future processing.</p>	<p>timelines will be determined by DAFM taking into consideration the regulatory review and the outputs of the organisational review.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish process for reducing the backlog to achieve the targets including prioritisation and scheduling. 	<p>The DAFM Licensing Plan Q2 Update has been published and available at <u>gov.ie - Forestry Licensing Plan 2022 (www.gov.ie)</u> which includes key targets and KPIs to reduce the number of licences on hand. Following a complete Business Systems and Process review a number of systems and process improvements including Application Tracker, Ecology Tracking system, BI reports and Pre-Application Discussion have been implemented. These improvements in addition to hiring additional ecologists and providing training on preparing Habitat maps to foresters are part of the continuous effort to reduce the backlog.</p>	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor publications of the number, type, and area of applications within the backlog against the trajectory. 	<p>Monthly stats in addition to weekly dashboard are produced and checked.</p>	5

(Ratings - 1 Started/Planning, 2 Meetings/Workshops, 3 Analysis/Design, 4 Implement/Deliver, 5 Completed signed off)

WG2 Shared National Strategy	Scope: cover a number of recommendations to develop national view of what Ireland wants from trees, woods and forests. Imperatives are to increase wood-based products, inform Government Policy and bring stakeholders together.	Status	Rating 1-5
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish cross society vision of the role of trees, woods, and forests in Ireland's future- including social, environmental, and economic outcomes in alignment with UN's sustainable goals and the EU Recovery Plan. 	Following an extensive public consultation, a draft vision has been submitted to the Minister for approval.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align the actions of key public organisations to the delivery of the vision. 	Work has commenced on building more collaboration across public agencies and the wider stakeholder community through the vision and strategy creation process. Aligning actions of key sector organisations to the delivery of the strategy will now become a key focus for strategy implementation, recognising that many public sector organisations will have a role in implementation.	3

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build and support a coalition of stakeholders to support, champion and promote delivery of shared forestry objectives. 	<p>Stakeholder mapping exercise has been completed. Through the work of Project Woodland there is now a stronger coalition of stakeholders with diverse views and interests that can support, champion and promote delivery of a shared national vision. Continuing to build and support this coalition and associated shared vision and objectives will be a key part of strategy implementation.</p>	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a shared, objective assessment of the suitability and availability of land for a range of different types of forestry across Ireland. 	<p>A national land cover map is currently being prepared by the National Land Use Review Group. The National Land use review will start towards the end of Q4 and will be led by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the DAFM with support from the EPA. This work will then feed into strategy implementation and the adoption of a more plan-led approach to forest management.</p>	3
Principal Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forestry Strategy 	<p>3rd Draft of the Forest Strategy has been submitted to the Project Board and the</p>	4

		Minister for review and approval.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated terms of reference for Forestry Policy Group reflecting other changes, including forward agenda 	The future role and purpose of the Forest Policy Group will now be considered as part of the strategy implementation planning process.	1

(Ratings - 1 Started/Planning, 2 Meetings/Workshops, 3 Analysis/Design, 4 Implement/Deliver, 5 Completed signed off)

WG3 – Organisational Development	Scope Covers a number of recommendations in respect to improving proactive leadership and providing responsive customer- service ethos via a new Customer Charter. Recommendations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit additional staff Introduce genuine KPIs Develop Customer Charter Raise status and profile of the inspectorate Review education and Training of Forestry professionals 	Status	Rating 1-5
Objectives	Objectives: ensure that future staff structures, customer focus and systems of the forestry team within the Department are fit for purpose and:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that DAFM, COFORD, Teagasc and Coillte work better collectively for the development, promotion, regulation, and delivery of forestry policies. 	This will be an on-going part of strategy implementation and will need to be considered in the light of the organisational review.	5

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft a new /revised Customer Charter. 	Draft document done. Awaiting input from WG1 on timelines.	3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct Training Needs Analysis. 	TNA commenced by Auxilia consultants and is due for completion by the end of August.	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft a Communications and Promotion Strategy. 	Updated Comms strategy document drafted and aligned to shared vision from WG2. To be finalised by end of Q3.	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft the terms of reference for independent organisational capabilities consultants. 	Done. Responses from tenders currently being evaluated with an outline estimate of 3 months to complete the organisational review.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree an approach to communicating with stakeholders and promoting sustainable forestry. 	Conferences and workshops held at Oakpark April 13 th and Athlone May 11 th to enable better communication and promotion of initiatives with key stakeholders to include DAFM, Teagasc, COFORD, Coillte, Irish Forest Owners and other members from the work groups.	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of value of woodland creation. 	Extensive public consultation has taken place and a shared vision approved by the Minister.	5

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take Stock of multiplicity of campaigns. 	Completed.	5
Principal Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renewed Organisational Structure 	This will be the output from the Organisational Review.	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer Charter 	Draft charter awaiting finalization.	3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set of KPIS and associated targets 	This will be done with the finalization of the customer charter.	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New suite of training courses (ideally run jointly between DAFM and others) 	Habitat Map Training completed for professional foresters, ecologists and DAFM staff. Teagasc training on Forest Management provided and on completion of the Training Needs Analysis in September training will be provided on Forest Licensing applications.	3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website/web pages to explain the landscape of forestry bodies in Ireland 	The Forestry website was refreshed in January 2022. Further work to be done on this.	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refreshed mandate and profile for COFORD 	Work has commenced on the comparison of Teagasc, Coillte and COFORD. To be revisited in Q3.	3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications programme for Forestry in Ireland 	Communications Strategy nearing completion but awaiting the outputs of WG2 on forestry strategy.	3

(Ratings - 1 Started/Planning, 2 Meetings/Workshops, 3 Analysis/Design, 4 Implement/Deliver, 5 Completed signed off)

WG4 Process	Scope. Number of recommendations in WG4 aimed at improving efficiency and effectiveness of process to deliver better results while addressing legal and regulatory requirements.	Status	Rating 1-5
Objectives	WG4 has two key objectives (a) improve efficiency and effectiveness of the license process and (b) improve the quality of applications at front-end of the process. Work will focus on:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendation for Pre-Application Discussion. 	Following a successful Pilot, a draft implementation plan and terms of reference have been completed and expect a nationwide rollout the end of the year.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed environment report with associated grant 	Scheme sanctioned and payments have commenced under Form 2 stage.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> End-to-end process review of the licensing system. This may lead to recommendations for appropriate transformation of administrative technology aspects. 	Business/Systems analyses complete, and recommendations being implemented under the direction of a DAFM agile implementation group.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish if a single licence consent is feasible. 	Regulatory review completed and does not recommend single integrated license for all forestry activities. DAFM has submitted an action plan and the project board will make	4

		recommendations to the Minister.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure adherence to regulatory standards 	Implicit in all actions.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent regulatory review 	Complete. Following discussions with Group Chairs and Board to review and DAFM developing an action plan.	4
Principal Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear explanation of the statutory basis for forestry regulation process 	Done. As described in the Philip Lee report.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-application meetings and Issue Log process 	Pilot phase concluded, now being rolled out nationally.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated licensing process 	Business/Systems analyses and PAD a contribution. Action Plan post regulatory review will be a key input.	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot of environmental report process and recommendation for where it should be used alongside grant support 	Done. Scheme now being implemented by DAFM.	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training courses to be provided for DAFM staff, prescribed bodies and registered foresters to embed new process for pre-application meetings, issues log and environmental report 	Habitat Map Training completed for professional foresters, ecologists and DAFM staff. Teagasc are provided training on Forest Management and training will be provided on Forest Licensing applications on completion of the Training	5

		Needs Analysis in September.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved processes for registered foresters to keep abreast of changing environmental regulations 	TNA underway to identify training needs for Foresters and due for completion by the end of August.	5

MACKINNON/O'HARA RECOMMENDATIONS STATUS

No.	Ways Forward	Status	Project Woodland Working Group	Update on Implementation
1	Raise the political profile and commitment to woodland creation.	Completed	WG2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public and stakeholder engagement phase completed. The new Climate Action Plan for 2022 highlights the national importance of forestry and woodland creation. Forestry is seen as a crucial element in responding to climate change with a target of 8000ha and supporting actions set out in the Climate Action Plan, which has broad political support. The public and stakeholder engagement processes for the vision and strategy work are building a more positive narrative about forestry to assist with achieving political and wider stakeholder buy-in. An Online Public consultation has recently closed and over 3000 responses have been received, a report on the Public Consultation will be published in September. A deliberative dialogue took place on 10th of May which has a similar format to the citizens assembly, consisting of 99 citizens representing the general demographic of our population.
2	Focus action on reducing current backlog of applications.	In progress	WG1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of on hand applications continues to decline steadily as a result of extra resources and efficiencies put in place. Licensing is gathering pace – year-to-date, as of 2nd September 2022, there were 3,252 licences issued (felling/afforestation/roads) against 2,440 applications received. However, targets for afforestation are not yet being reached. There will have to be a greater focus on accelerating Afforestation licences in the second half of 2022 to meet Plan targets. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/21b71-for-estry-licence-plan-2022/#
3	Introduce Pre-Application discussions with Issues/Action Log.	Completed	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Pre-application Discussion pilot has been completed. DAFM are preparing a Standard Operating Procedure for nationwide roll out.
4	New Requirement for Environment Report supported by Planning Grant.	Completed	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DAFM have commenced payment of an Environmental Support Grant at Form 2 stage.

5	Address problems with poor quality applications.	In progress	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rec 19 (WG3), Rec 3(WG4) and Rec 4(WG4) are fundamental to improving quality. Work is underway to address the need to update Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) & training. Training has been provided to foresters, ecologists and DAFM staff on preparing Habitat maps in addition to training provided by Teagasc on Forestry Management. This is reflected in an improvement in more recent applications. Bringing all application forms and screens up to date is a key objective of the Agile Implementation team. <p>Pre application discussion available for applicants.</p>
6	Develop guidance on the Habitats Directive as it affects licensing applications.	In progress	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulatory review complete. Project Board considering and DAFM preparing action plan. Any subsequent changes in approach will be outlined to the sector.
7	Discuss with the European Commission the impact of the Directive and woodland creation to support the Climate Action Plan.	Commenced	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preliminary engagement with EU Commissioner for Environment and Agri on Irish Forestry Programme. Formal Submission to Commission of the new Strategy and Programme expected in the Autumn.
8	Revise Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and National Monuments Service (NMS).	In progress	WG2	<p>Consideration is being given to discussions with additional state bodies and to revising MoUs with NMS and NPWS for finalisation in Q3. This task is being led by DAFM.</p>
9	Recruit additional inspectors and environmental specialists.	Completed	WG3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DAFM has recruited additional staff and is currently recruiting additional inspectors. There are 36 FTE ecologists working on licensing. The DAFM Organisational Review to take place in Q3 of 2022 will assess capabilities including resources.
10	Introduce genuine Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).	In progress	WG3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WG3 will develop 5 key KPIs, to measure and report progress, in finalising the Vision and Customer Charter
11	Develop a Customer Service Charter.	In progress	WG3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This will be revisited in final Customer Charter following completion of the WG2's Strategy work by mid-2022 – the draft envisages profiling application types, ownerships and scales against timelines within the Charter. Finalisation dependent on (a) outcome of process and regulatory reviews and (b) completion of Strategy for Q4 by WG2

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The issue of statutory timelines is dependent on information supplied in Regulatory Review
12	Prepare a Forestry Strategy for Ireland.	In progress	WG2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work is under way in developing a new Forestry Strategy and Implementation Plan based on the Shared Vision agreed under Project Woodland. This is the core task of WG2 with the aim of producing a Final Strategy by Q4 of 2022. The necessary SEA/AA will impact final delivery due to statutory timelines on publication.
13	Ensure all State Bodies play their part in implementing the Strategy.	In progress	WG2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Forestry Policy Group includes a number of state bodies (NPWS, Teagasc, Coillte and EPA) who are actively involved in Project Woodland. Bilateral consultations have taken place in formation of strategy with relevant state bodies such as Coillte and Teagasc during Q1 and Q2 2022. As the first phase of Project Woodland concludes with the release of the Forestry Strategy in 2022, a new Forestry Programme will start in January 2023 offering new schemes and supports to include to recommendations and solutions transferred from phase 1.
14	Establish an Irish Forestry Standard.	de-scoped	WG2	The Project Board has decided to remove this from current scope of Project Woodland and re-visit later in the year.
15	Raise the status and profile of the Inspectorate.	In progress	WG3	This will be dealt with under DAFM Organisational review to be carried out in Q3 of 2022.
16	Need for greater commitment by all to partnership working.	Completed	WG2	Project Woodland was established to address the licencing issues and progress a new Forestry strategy through building a partnership and collaborative culture with sector stakeholders, NGOs, public and State bodies.
17	Raise awareness of value of woodland creation and a vibrant forest industry.	Completed	WG3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Call for Proposals for Woodland Support funding was launched in 2021 and 39 projects aimed at raising awareness of the multi-functional benefits of forestry were approved for a total funding of €1.4 million, to be delivered in 2021/2022. A Communication Strategy has been devised and collaborative workshop were held in April and May to progress this. The DAFM forestry website has been re-freshed.
18	Take stock of the multiplicity of campaigns and initiatives to promote woodland creation.	Completed	WG3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mapping exercise of current communications and promotions activity throughout the forestry sector, including the Woodland Support funded projects and Teagasc, was completed in January 2022. A Gap Analysis will be finalised in September in conjunction with Communications planning work. A workshop to foster greater collaboration between the Woodland Support funded projects

				was held in May 2022 attended by project co-ordinators from each of the groups, facilitated by COFORD.
19	Review education and training of forestry professionals.	In progress	WG3	A Training Needs Analysis is underway and due for completion in September 2022.
20	Introduce fees for submitting applications, making submissions and lodging appeals.	Complete	WG4	Introduced under the Forestry (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act in 2020.
21	Conduct pilot studies on land availability, including the potential for woodland creation on areas of unenclosed land.	De-scoped	WG2	This issue is broader than forestry. A national land use study is underway led by DECC and DAFM with input from the EPA. This will need public consultation during 2022. Phase I of the exercise (mapping) is expected to be completed in Q3 2022, and phase II will commence
22	In the longer term review the legislation on forestry and consider the introduction of a single consent covering planting, road construction, management and felling.	In Progress	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An end-to-end process review was carried out towards the end of 2021 and is currently in the implementation phase. During April 2022, the cross-functional Agile Implementation team completed its initial assessment of all the Process/System items and also the ongoing iFORIS Modernisation Programme. A regulatory review of forestry licensing has been completed and the findings presented in a report which is currently under consideration. The Regulatory Review Report does not recommend a complete single consent scheme as a solution (Afforestation/Thinning/Roading/Felling) within the current legal and regulatory framework. However, it offers various suggestions as to how the process can be made simpler, more predictable and resilient. These are being evaluated for implementation.