



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

Project Woodland

Project Board

Interim Report No. 5

October 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 October 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 **1,683** as of 14th October 2022. There are now 933 afforestation licences approved with 6,882 ha ready to be planted. 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.
- **3,629 Licences Issued** which is **92% of YTD** target as set out in the plan across afforestation roads and felling.
- To date 10 of the **Mackinnon Report Recommendations** are completed, 2 de-scoped and the majority of the remaining 10 recommendations have been addressed and are near completion or will be transferred back into DAFM for ongoing implementation and monitoring.
- 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 Board has submitted their report and a set of recommendations to the Minister, and DAFM will now submit their Action Plan.
- The **Shared National Vision for Forestry 2050** has been published on the DAFM website following a press release by the Minister along with a report on the 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.

- The Minister and Project Board Members received a draft of the **Forest Strategy** with a follow-up presentation given by the WG chair and the DAFM lead to the project board.
- Following a review by ARUP, the **Screening Report** for the Forest Strategy was sent to the Statutory Consultees on 26th Aug with a 4-week window for submissions as part of the SEA/AA process. Two submissions were received and DAFM will issue a determination regarding the SEA/AA process for the Forest Strategy in October.
- The draft **Forest Strategy** along with the **Forest Strategy Implementation Plan** (which includes the new Forestry Programme 2023-2027) has been published on the DAFM web site for a period of Public Consultation to be followed by a soft launch of the Forest Strategy by the Minister.
- **Grant Thornton** have commenced the **Organisation Review**. One-to-one interviews with key personnel and stakeholders, meetings with staff focus groups and on-line survey with all forestry staff in the three divisions are already under-way as data capture to enable analytical phase.
- **Training Needs Analysis** has been completed by Auxilia and a final report submitted to the working group and the Project Board. DAFM will now provide an action plan to implement the recommendations.
- The on-going **Business Systems and Process** review is working closely with the Agile Implementation Group to implement new process and systems improvements with 13 items completed and a further 7 in progress, and 28 currently being reviewed. The next stage deliverables from the AIG work group are currently focussed on deliverables for the new Forestry Programme 2023-2027.
- **COFORD** presentation given by Fergus Moore to WG-3, with a proposal that COFORD will use their meeting to discuss a refreshed mandate and present draft document at the next WG-3 meeting, given the advisory role of COFORD with focus on Policy.
- **WG-1** organised a field trip to **None-So-Hardy** and visited Paulbeg Dispatch stores in Carnew, Donishal nursey 300 acres and Birch seed Orchard at Ballymurn 280 acres. None-So-Hardy supplies 90% of the stock for private-sector afforestation in Ireland and this highlighted the interdependence between None-So-Hardy and DAFM (issuing licences) in meeting the Government targets for afforestation in Ireland. This was a first in person meeting for a number of the stakeholders and although challenges still remain in issuing licences there was an acknowledgement that improvements have been made by DAFM in terms of licensing throughput based on the latest Weekly Dashboards.

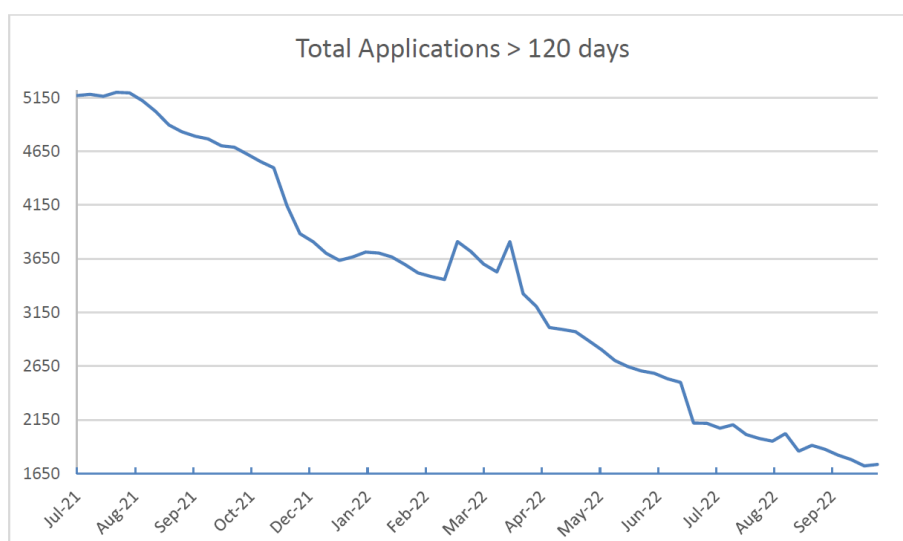
LICENSING OUTPUTS

Progress continues in reducing the **Backlog of licensing applications**. The number of licences on hand > 120 days continues to decline and is down from 3,700 at the start of 2022 to 1,683. 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 3** update is available at [gov.ie - Forestry Licensing Plan 2022 \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie - Forestry Licensing Plan 2022)

SUMMARY OF QUARTER 3 2022 OUTPUT AND KPIs

1. Licencing output YTD at 3,629 is 92% of the targets set in the Plan.
2. The number of applications received YTD is 2,658.
3. **1,180** new forestry licences issued in Q3. This is 90% of the target set in the plan for Q3 (1,313 licences).
4. The number of applications on hand for processing has dropped from 4,801 at the end of 2021 to **3,133** in Q3 which is a net reduction of 1,668.
5. This inclusive of the **1,580** new applications received in Q3, comprising 117 afforestation, 1,334 felling and 39 roads.
6. In relation to afforestation, the quarterly licensing output for the third quarter of 2022 is **238** licences, which is well ahead of the output for Quarter 2 of 131.
7. There are now 933 approved afforestation contracts with **6,882 ha** ready for planting
8. In relation to felling, overall felling licence output YTD is on target (2,512 licences issued vs. 2,535 target). Private felling significantly exceeded Coillte felling in Q3. **472** vs 294.
9. Output of road licences YTD is at **93%** of the output target.

BACKLOG (APPLICATION AGED OVER 120 DAYS)



PROJECT STATUS

To date 10 of the Mackinnon report recommendations are completed, 2 de-scoped and the majority of the remaining 10 recommendations have been addressed and are near completion or will be transferred back into DAFM for ongoing implementation and monitoring. 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 2023-2027 and the appropriate implementation strategy.

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">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.Following a press release by the Minister the Shared Vision 2050 for wood and trees has been published in addition to a summary report on the 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.
2	Focus action on reducing current backlog of applications.	In progress	WG1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Progress continues in reducing the backlog with a reduction from the start of 2022 of 3,700 applications on-hand to 1,683 as of the 14th October 2022.Licensing is gathering pace and the latest update for Licencing Q3 shows 3,629 Licences issued which is 92% of the YTD targetThere are 933 afforestation licences approved with 6,882 ha ready to be planted.

3	Introduce Pre-Application discussions with Issues/Action Log.	Completed	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following a successful pilot run the Pre-Application process is being rolled out nationwide. Greater use of this is encouraged to inform prospective applicants on the issues
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 with 70 payments made to date.
5	Address problems with poor quality applications.	In progress	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Pre application discussions are being rolled out nationwide as one of the key recommendations to enable applicants to better understand and prepare applications to DAFM.
6	Develop guidance on the Habitats directive as it affects licensing applications	In progress	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project Board has submitted a report and a set of recommendations to the Minister in response to the Regulatory review and this will be followed by DAFM action plan to focus on implementation of key recommendations that will have an impact to improve the processing of applications and issuing licenses in timely manner.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration is being given to discussions with additional state bodies and to revising MOUs with NMS and NPWS for finalisation in Q4. This action is being led out by DAFM.
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 licencing. The DAFM Organisational Review to take place in Q4 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"> An initial draft has been completed which envisages profiling application types, ownerships and scales against timelines within the Charter.

				<p>Finalisation is dependent on (a) outcome of process and regulatory reviews and (b) completion of Strategy for Q4 by WG2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the legal statutory review on licensing, a DAFM action plan will be implemented to introduce time scales for processing different licence application types and these will be incorporated into the customer Charter.
12	Prepare a Forest Strategy for Ireland.	In progress	WG2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Shared Vision 2050 for woods, forests and trees has been approved and published by the Minister. The Statutory Consultation process has been completed and is under review. The Public Consultation of the Forest Strategy and the Forest Strategy Implementation plan is scheduled for mid-October The Forest Strategy is planned for soft launch by the Minister in November
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 Forest 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. The Forest Strategy Implementation Plan (in draft) will involve shared responsibility, collaboration and ownership across all Government Departments. The goals set out in this Plan are underpinned by a number of strategic and interconnected areas of focus. One of these areas is 'Institutional Arrangements and Implementation Structures' which seeks to put in place strong and effective implementation, monitoring and reporting structures. Stakeholders will have direct input into this process.
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 Q4 2022.
16	Need for greater commitment by all to partnership working.	Completed	WG2	Project Woodland was established to address the licensing 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.	Completed	WG3	Final report on Training Needs Analysis completed by Auxilia Consultants and submitted to DAFM and Work Group 3.
20	Introduce fees for submitting applications, making submissions and lodging appeals.	Completed	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 Q4 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.	Completed	WG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A regulatory review of forestry licensing has been completed and the Project Board has submitted a report and a set of recommendations to the Minister to be followed by a DAFM action plan. The Regulatory Review Report does not recommend a single consent scheme as a viable 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. Longer term, the report strongly endorses a 'Plan Led' approach designating suitable zones and conditions, following robust statutory process. However, this would take a number of years to facilitate detailed technical studies, alignment with other 'land Use' plans, extensive stakeholder and public consultation and adoption following AA/SEA.

