



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

# Forestry Licensing Plan 2024

The Plan for Ireland's Forestry Sector

[gov.ie/forestry](https://gov.ie/forestry)



## INTRODUCTION

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has a range of forestry priorities for 2024. This includes the delivery of a new Forest Strategy and Forestry Programme, which involves:

- The introduction and administration of the new forestry schemes, and the new range of payments to landowners.
- The implementation of wider Government policy, including the Climate Action Plan, through forestry.
- The essential work on Forest Reproductive Material (FRM), and our plant health controls and checks.

## OVERVIEW

In 2024, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will continue to build on recent improvements to its licencing system. The Department will continue to outstrip demand by processing more applications than it receives. It is ready to issue sufficient afforestation licences to meet its annual planting target of 8,000 hectares - in effect, the achievement of this target will depend on whether sufficient applications are received.

2022 saw sustained progress in reducing the amount of licence applications with the Department and, in terms of felling, the same progress was achieved in 2023.

Following on from State Aid approval from the European Commission, the Government adopted a new Forestry Programme on 6 September 2023. This is a significant milestone for forestry that will allow for the expansion, protection and development of Ireland's forests and the forestry sector.

Conscious of the needs of the sector and, therefore, the need to bridge the gap between the new and old programmes, the Department introduced an Interim Afforestation Scheme, an Interim Forest Road Scheme and an interim Reconstitution Scheme for Ash-dieback via General De Minimis. This ensured that those with valid afforestation licences issued before the end of 2022 could avail of the 2023 planting season under the higher grant and premium rates proposed under the new Programme. Likewise, those with valid road licences and approvals under the Ash Dieback Scheme at the end of 2022 could avail of the higher grants and enhanced payment rates as proposed under the new Programme.

The new Afforestation Scheme for the 2023-2027 period opened for applications on 6 September 2023. This Afforestation Scheme offers landowners a choice of 12 Forest Types, which cover a broad range of planting options. It provides generous incentives to farmers in particular to re-engage with forestry. This can be seen in the increased premium rates for afforestation. These increases range from 46% to 66%, along with a longer premium term of 20 years for farmers (compared to 15 years for non-farmers) across most Forest Types. To date, 84% of new afforestation applicants are farmers, with 46% choosing FT12 (Mixed high forests with 20% broadleaves) and 43% choosing FT1 (Native Forests).



Agroforestry has also been revised significantly in order to facilitate increased uptake. Agroforestry was first introduced to Ireland's forestry support schemes in 2015, and the new Afforestation Scheme will increase the period for premiums from five to 10 years. To date, support has targeted the establishment of silvopastoral systems, which combine forestry and pasture, including grazing and the growing of fodder. It is proposed to expand this in the Forestry Programme 2023-2027, with pilot schemes for both silvoarable and forest gardening systems.

The Programme also contains a new Native Tree Area Scheme, which builds on a recent amendment to the Forestry Act 2014 that removed the licensing requirement for the planting of native woodland in areas not greater than one hectare. The Scheme also supports planting for an additional hectare to protect water courses. The input of foresters registered with the Department is required in order to ensure that the eligibility criteria set out in the Scheme terms and conditions are adhered to. It is the Department's objective to increase and encourage interest in small-scale planting.

The independent group to review existing Department supports for Ash Dieback has presented its report, which is being considered in detail. There is currently a reconstitution scheme for ash dieback open for applications under the new Forestry Programme 2023-2027. This scheme includes the following enhanced features:

- 100% increase in the site clearance grant rate, from €1,000 to €2,000;
- Enhanced replanting grant rates;
- Those applicants whose sites are still in premium will continue to receive the premium due for the remaining years;

In addition, for those in receipt of farmer rate of premium, a top-up premium equal to the difference between the equivalent forest type and the existing premium will be paid. This will be calculated for the remaining years left in premium, and paid in a single sum.

When the Reconstitution Ash Dieback Scheme 2023-2027 opened in July, it was noted that if a forest owner made an application they would not be disadvantaged if any changes are made as a result of the independent review process. This remains the case, and ash plantation owners are encouraged to engage with the enhanced reconstitution scheme as the quickest and most effective way to clear and reconstitute affected sites in compliance with the Forestry Act 2014.

## LICENCING PLAN 2024 KEY TARGETS

In June 2022, the Environmental Protection Agency published its latest emissions projections, showing net Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) emissions as being projected to rise to 11 MtCO<sub>2</sub>eq. in 2030. To help combat this, the Climate Action plan has a target of 8,000 hectares for afforestation. DAFM has committed in the new Farmers Charter for a turnaround time of 6 months for projects screened out for additional environmental assessment and 9 months for those



projects that are screened in. The independent regulatory review<sup>1</sup> of forestry licensing, commissioned through Project Woodland, found that Ireland must continue to operate a licensing system to meet the requirements of EU law and that there is no legal basis for the argument that forestry should be treated in the same way as other forms of agricultural land use.

In 2022, the Department processed 1,200 more licence applications than it received, and in 2023, the Department has processed over 800 more felling licences than applications received. As a result of this, the large number of files that was with the Department has largely been cleared. Over the next year, the Department will get back to a steady state situation where files in and out will be largely the same as the year progresses, and the focus will be on reducing turnaround times to comply with farmers charter commitments.

- It is anticipated that private felling licence applications will be around 1,000 applications in 2024, while output will be in the region of 1,250 in 2024.
- It is anticipated that Coillte felling licence applications will be around 1,300 applications in 2024, and it is anticipated that output will match this at 1,300 licences.
- It is anticipated that road licence applications will be around 600 applications in 2024, while output will be in the region of 650 in 2024.

Afforestation licence decisions will more than match applications. Afforestation applications would need to be around 1,000 applications per year to achieve 8,000 hectares. However, the number of licences issued ultimately depends on the number of applications received. The Department has capacity to issue sufficient licences in 2024 to plant 8,000 hectares.

The Department will also refocus on the approval of most of the applications on hand and received under several schemes, including Reconstitution Scheme of Ash Dieback, the Native Woodland Conservation Scheme and the Native Tree Area Scheme.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Project Woodland: Regulatory Review Report" by solicitors Philip Lee LLP is available online: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/20b48-regulatory-review-of-forestry/>. Page 3 of the report states "Afforestation requires a prior consent procedure which ensures that an EIA screening determination is made by a competent authority before planting is permitted to proceed. Felling and other forestry activities, also require a prior consent procedure which provides for the carrying out of AA screening and full AA (if required)."



## PROJECTED LICENCE APPLICATIONS IN 2024

In 2024, we expect to receive approximately 2,900 new licence applications across Coillte felling, private felling and roads. A breakdown of this figure is set out in **Table 1** below. This is based on indications from applicants, trends in applications from previous years and projections included in the COFORD Roundwood forecast. Also included is an estimate of 1,000 afforestation applications, which would be the required number of afforestation applications to be received in order for the target of 8,000 hectares to be met.

TABLE 1: LICENCE APPLICATIONS

Licence area	Received 2019	Received 2020	Received 2021	Received 2022	Received 2023 (to 15/12/23)	<u>Estimate to be received 2024</u>
Coillte felling	1,674	422	2,299	811	1,080	1,300
Private felling	1,626	1,340	1,302	1,184	890	1,000
Roads	755	792	761	614	670	600
Afforestation	1,226	1,053	642	533	297	1,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,281</b>	<b>3,607</b>	<b>5,004</b>	<b>3,142</b>	<b>2,937</b>	<b>3,900</b>

TABLE 2: LICENCE OUTPUT

Year	No. of licences issued	Afforestation	Forest Roads	Felling Coillte	Felling Private
<b>2019</b>	5,310	588	542	3,134	1,046
<b>2020</b>	2,592	525	350	865	852
<b>2021</b>	4,050	502	671	1,532	1,345
<b>2022</b>	4,713	702	718	1,686	1,607
<b>2023 (to 15/12/23)</b>	3,105	83	221	1,402	1,399
<b>2024 TARGET</b>	4,200	1,000	650	1,300	1,250

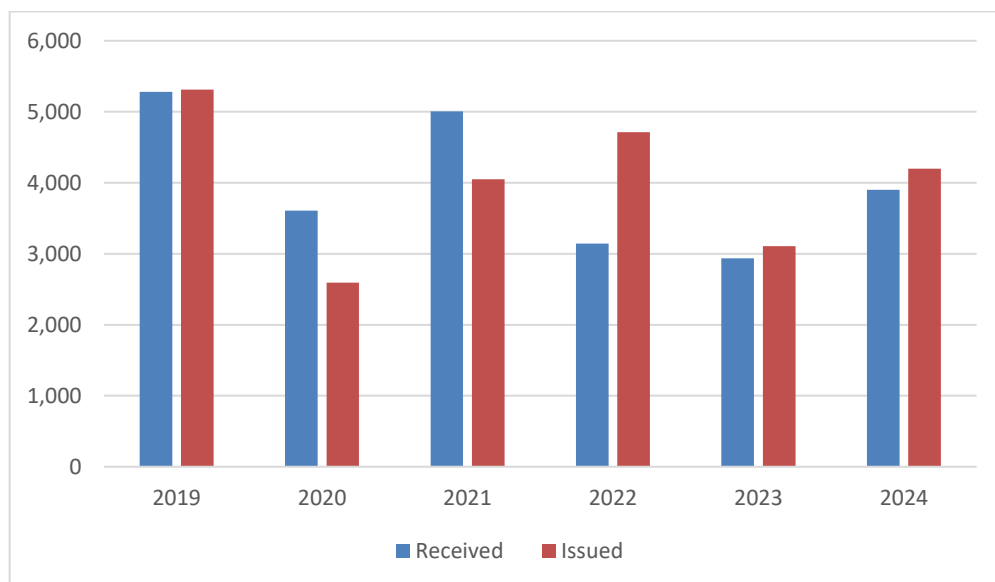
To 15/12/23 - In addition to the above, DAFM has processed 92 applications (covering an area of 808 hectares) already approved under Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 that hadn't commenced planting and have now opted into the new Forestry Programme 2023 – 2027. Approvals under the new Reconstitution of Ash Dieback (RAD) scheme have begun, with 176 approvals covering an area of 762.79 hectares. Finally, 13 approvals have been processed to date under the Native Tree Area Scheme, covering an area of 13.6 hectares.

The 2024 licence targets are set in the context of an estimate of the number of applications expected to be received in 2024 under the various licence types. The estimate is based on small



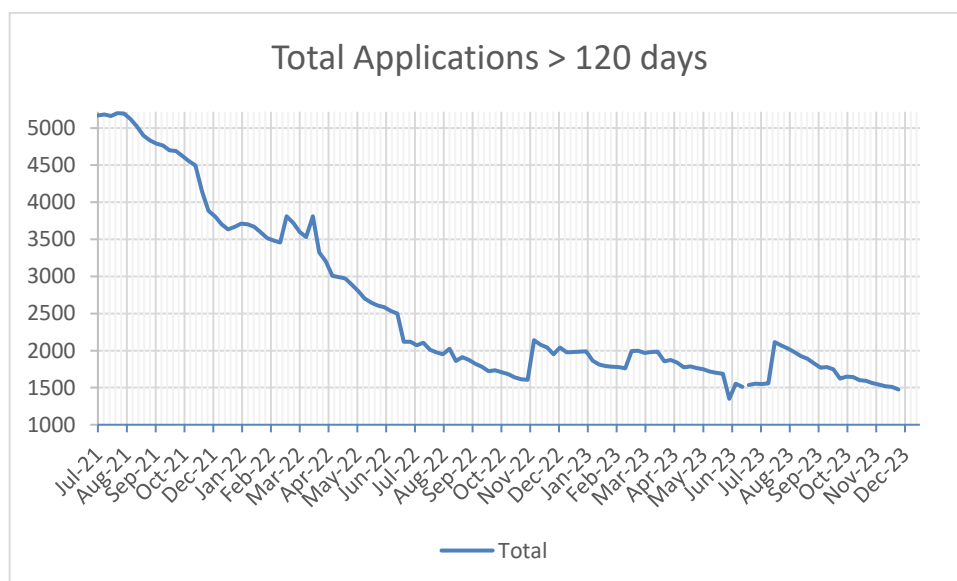
expected changes in felling and road applications and a large increase in applications for afforestation, given the significant increase in grants and premiums, and an extensive DAFM-funded promotion campaign. Meeting the targets will depend on a number of factors, including the actual number of applications received.

#### TOTAL LICENCE APPLICATIONS PROCESSED FROM 2019 TO 2023, AND 2024 PLAN



Currently there are 2,196 licence applications on hand. Of these, 1,477 have been with the Department for more than 120 days.

#### TOTAL APPLICATIONS IN DEPARTMENT GREATER THAN 120 DAYS





## Turnaround times

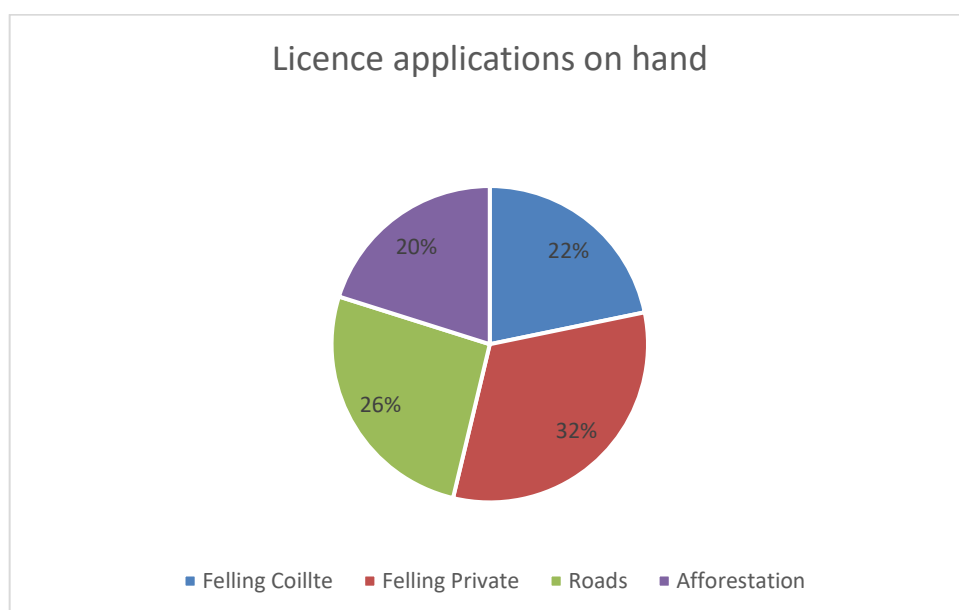
The target for 2024 will be to process certified afforestation, roads and felling files within 6 months for 'screened out' applications and 9 months for 'screened in' applications.

It is worth noting that fully completed applications will progress through the system faster than applications that are missing key data. Turnaround times are significantly delayed each time the Department is required to request further information from the applicant/forester on proposed works. Applicants can now avail of the Environment Report Grant to help offset the cost the cost of environmental reports

TABLE 3: BREAKDOWN OF TOTAL LICENCES WITH THE DEPARTMENT ON 15TH DECEMBER 2023

Type of Licence	Number	%
Felling Coillte	478	22%
Felling Private	702	32%
Roads	574	26%
Afforestation	442	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,196</b>	<b>100%</b>

Situation as of 15th December 2023





## Licensing Plan 2024 Overall summary

**Table 4** below sets out the projected licensing output for 2024, which is influenced by several factors:

- Likely number of applications received.
- The relative breakdown of each category of licence application received.
- The quality of applications received.
- Likely number and quality of other scheme applications (e.g., Recon, NWCS).

Other factors that may influence output are unforeseen changes to the regulatory framework, these are largely outside the Department's control and it is unknown how they may impact on licensing output in 2024.

The Department will issue a quarterly update indicating progress, in order to provide ongoing clarity on the licensing plan and to allow monitoring of delivery on the various key performance indicators (KPIs).

**TABLE 4: 2023 LICENCE OUTPUT AND 2024 PLANNED LICENSING DELIVERY**

Licence area	Received 2023	Issued 2023*	Estimate to be received 2024	Projected to issue in 2024
Coillte felling	1,080	1,402	1,300	1,300
Private felling	890	1,399	1,000	1,250
Roads	670	221	600	650
Afforestation	297	83	1,000	1,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,937</b>	<b>3,105</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>4,200</b>

\*Figures for 2023 are as of 15th December





## Projected Licensing 2024 by category

### LICENSING PRIORITY 1: IMPROVE TURNAROUND TIMES TO MATCH FARMERS CHARTER COMMITMENTS

- Continue to reduce the figure of licences on hand by issuing more licences on average each week than received.
- Give priority to applications already received and which have been opted in to the new programme.
- Remove all felling licences predating 2023 by end of the second quarter 2024.
- Reduce the turnaround time for all licence applications to match the commitments in the Farmers Charter.

### LICENSING PRIORITY 2: PLACE A GREATER FOCUS ON AFFORESTATION

- Ensure a different balance of licences in 2024 to afford **higher priority to afforestation**.
- Maintain appropriate reallocation and recruitment of administrative, forestry inspector, archaeology and ecology resources to focus on afforestation, while also applying improved systems to streamline the process.

### LICENSING PRIORITY 3: IMPROVE QUALITY OF FORESTRY APPLICATIONS

- Improve quality of applications received by applicants and registered foresters through training, webinars and circulars for private ecologists and professional foresters.
- Deliver further ecology-led training for professional foresters to facilitate the submission of habitat maps and related information to accompany applications.
- Deliver a wider communication strategy beyond foresters, ecologists and applicants to increase awareness of, and confidence in, the processes and systems used by the Department.

### LICENSING PRIORITY 4: DELIVER ON OTHER SCHEME APPROVALS

- In 2024, the Department will also work on non-licence scheme approvals, prioritising the following:
  - - Reconstitution Scheme for ash dieback
  - - Native Tree Area Scheme
  - - Native Woodland Conservation Scheme



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

