

# Sharp rise in private forest timber an Irish success story



**Seán Lenihan** gives an update on the Irish forestry and timber sector

One of the many good news stories associated with the Irish forestry in general, and the private forest estate in particular has been the significant increase in timber mobilisation from private forests in the past 10 years. While many in the industry would argue that it should be at an even higher level, the figures are nonetheless impressive.

In 2008, the output from Irish private forests was 118,000m<sup>3</sup>, and by the end of 2017 it had increased to 676,000m<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the areas applied for via the Felling Licence process has increased from 10,382ha of thinning in 2010 to 16,697 in 2017, and from 439ha also in 2010 to 2133 in 2017. The expectation is that these volumes will continue to rise, as the crops planted during the afforestation boom in the nineties and noughties which averaged 12,000ha annually, come on stream.

## BARRIERS TO FURTHER INCREASING PRIVATE OUTPUT

The lack of active or indeed any management whatsoever by some owners has resulted in some crops (especially on gley soils) reaching excessive top heights, thus rendering the plantation unsafe to thin due to windthrow potential.

Objections from the public to the issuing of Felling Licences have been steadily increasing since the new Felling Act came into law in 2017 and is delaying and/or modifying felling plans.

Access to private forests from public roads has proved to be problematic especially in some remote areas.

If all or some of the above can be addressed in a meaningful way then output levels from Ireland's private forests could be significantly increased.

Timber output from Irish private forests in cubic metres

**118,000**  
(2008)

**676,000**  
(2017)



**Clearfelling in a private forest in County Galway.**

## Continuous Cover Forestry Pilot Scheme

The Forest Service is to be commended for introducing an innovative CCF transformation scheme for forest owners in early 2019. Under the new scheme, forest growers with plantations up to 10ha who wish to transition from conventional clearfell/replanting to CCF over a 12-year period can apply for funding of €2250 per hectare paid in three instalments of €750. The principle objective of the scheme is to increase the area of forests under CCF.

A comprehensive Transformation Management Plan compiled by a qualified CCF forestry consultant

will form the basis for the application and subsequent works. Various operations will be eligible including high pruning, pre-thinning tree marking, felling extra trees to release frame trees, deer control and management and re-spacing of natural regeneration.

It is envisaged that no plantations over 300m will be eligible and that only crops growing on free draining mineral soils will be acceptable for grant aid. While only a Pilot Scheme it is envisaged that when the next Forestry Programme is launched in 2020 CCF will be consolidated as part of the five year programme.

>>

>>

## Forestry Promotion Fund

In April 2019, the forestry Minister Andrew Doyle announced that €830,000 in funding would be allocated to 15 projects which were selected o total of 40 submissions on the basis of the following promotional objectives set out by the government:

- Highlight the multifunctional benefits of forestry
- Promote planting of more trees
- Encourage sustainable forest management.

The projects which are to set to be to be rolled out in 2019 and 2020 include the establishment of Demonstration Woodlands, the promotion of forestry in schools using 'Forestry Ambassadors', and a Woodland Festival in the Northwest among others. It is hoped that the campaign will provide a balance to much of the anti-forestry and anti-Sitka spruce rhetoric which has been very prominent in the media here for the past few years.



## Study on forestry in County Leitrim

On a related topic, the Minister has just commissioned a study on forestry in County Leitrim, to be completed by August 2019. Leitrim has been the focus of a concentrated and active anti-forestry campaign in the last three years which has achieved national prominence in the mainstream and social media. The Terms of References are:

- To assess the social impacts of forestry in County Leitrim including attitudes to forestry of people living there.
- To assess the economic impact of forestry in the county including total employment supported by the sector.
- To assess the impact of farm incomes relative to other types of farming
- To assess the non-timber outputs of forestry.
- To assess the current state of environmental regulation of forestry in the county.

Irrespective of the results of this study which is being carried out by University College Dublin, it is hard to envisage that the prevailing and ingrained anti-forestry attitude which is prominent in the county will change to any significant degree. Nonetheless, on its own merits the commissioning of the study is timely and the industry will be hoping for positive results especially in relation to the economic impact of forestry on the county.

## Timber prices

Timber prices in the first quarter of 2019 more or less remained the same as the final quarter of 2018, with slightly higher prices evident in the second quarter to date.

Whether this will last is open to debate as cheaper sawn imports especially from Germany and Sweden are predicted to have an impact sooner rather than later. It is understood that the cheap imports from Germany are linked to felling in response to the spruce bark beetle.

In another market development, Euroforest Ireland who began exporting pulp to Kronospan in the UK last autumn are set to continue for the rest of 2019 and possibly beyond.

Current roadside prices (m<sup>3</sup>)

€31  
Pulp

€53  
Pallet

€80  
Commercial sawlog (up to)

*Seán Lenihan is managing director of Kestrel Forestry Consultants in North Wexford*

[www.kestrelforestry.ie](http://www.kestrelforestry.ie)