

Ms Lisa Frazer
Consultation Coordinator
Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Ballymiscaw
Belfast BT4 3SB

17th January 2022

Dear Ms Frazer,

**Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland
Response from the Confederation of Forest Industries UK – Confor**

[Confor](https://www.confor.org.uk) is the not-for-profit organisation for the UK’s sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses. It has 1,500 member companies, of which over 20 are based in Northern Ireland, representing the whole forestry and wood supply chain, from seed to products for the construction sector; whether it is managing woodland to maximise carbon storage or producing low-carbon products with a long lifecycle, our industry makes an important contribution to the economy through supplying high value, sustainable products and supporting good careers.

Confor agrees with the principles underpinning the Draft Strategy and the identified Strategic Environmental Outcomes. However, it is disappointing that forests and woodland are mentioned only in passing and their contribution in improving Northern Ireland’s environment and building a more resilient, low carbon and sustainable economy are mostly ignored.

Increasing tree cover, including planting of productive woodland, is an irreplaceable tool to deliver almost every vision/outcome described in the Draft Strategy: it supports farmers’ income while improving biodiversity and sustainability of farmed land; it can help create and improve new green spaces for public access and enjoyment; it provides essential timber for construction; it helps decarbonise the wider economy; it provides excellent career opportunities in rural areas; and it improves Northern Ireland’s carbon sink capacity. Yet, there is no thought or dedicated section for forests and forestry in the document.

An Environment Strategy that has no plan or role detailed for the forestry sector is not only a missed opportunity to tackle the climate emergency, but it is a risk to the country’s decarbonisation efforts and the sector’s future. Through its “Forests for our Future” scheme, the Northern Ireland Government has committed to planting 9,000ha of new woodland by 2030 but in 2020 only 280ha (of which 70ha were productive woodland) were planted; very far from the 2,000ha a year by 2025 that Minister Poots considers necessary. Confor members report continued issues and delays with

planting applications, a situation that is jeopardising the over 1,000 rural jobs supported by forestry in Northern Ireland.

We urge DAERA officials to review the Draft Strategy and include a section that sets out:

1. The important contribution of our woodlands to the rural economy and in the fight against climate change;
2. The Government's vision for the sector that re-energises efforts to increase woodland cover (including productive) and woodland management according to the UK Forestry Standard;
3. The Government's commitment to ensure a balanced approach that combines environmental and economic benefits.

Yours sincerely,



Andy Leitch

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Appendix A - Sources

- Forest Research, Forestry Statistics 2021;
https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/8143/Ch1_Woodland_FS2021.pdf
- DAERA; <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/poots-planting-pledge>
- Woodland Trust; <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/press-centre/2020/12/daera-minister-visits-forests-of-the-future/>