

## FROM THEN TO NOW

### Recent developments in Irish forestry

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Modern forestry in Ireland usually traces its origins to 1904, with the purchase of the Avondale estate in County Wicklow by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. However, forestry activities had an earlier beginning in the previous century.

During the second half of the 19th century an interest was developed in reversing the almost complete deforestation of the country. In Britain, focus on the unsatisfactory nature of national timber supplies was provided by the Royal Arboriculture Society in Scotland from 1854 and from 1881 by its counterpart in England. In 1883, the Crown Woods Commissioners began experimental planting on its mountain lands in the Isle of Man. The House of Commons appointed a Select Committee in 1885 to investigate forestry conditions. Dr. William Schlich, a leading German authority on scientific forestry, reported in 1886 that if afforestation in Ireland was approached judiciously and carried out economically, then it would prove of eventual value to the country. He concluded that the Government would have to take the initiative and suggested an outline organisation for a Central Authority, headed by a board and led by a Chief Forest Conservator (Durand, 1969).

Discussion on developments over much of the next one hundred years can be found in Durand (1969) and

various papers published in this journal and elsewhere. In 1979, the National Economic and Social Council published "Irish Forestry Policy": a review of the potential and implications of forestry for economic and social development in Ireland. During 1981, the Industrial Development Authority produced "Developing the Irish Timber Industry for the 1980s". With these publications, and an increasing volume of timber becoming available, the debate on forestry in recent times had begun, mirroring the interest given to it during the same period in the previous century.

During 1983 and 1984 there were a number of significant developments: the publication of "The Case for Forestry" by the Forest and Wildlife Service (FWS) and "Ireland's forestry - a review" by the Union of Professional and Technical Civil Servants (UPTCS) both in 1983; and, the establishment by the Government, in November 1984, of a Review Group on forestry, following on the publication of the Government's National Plan: "Building on Reality".

Much of the debate was concerned with organisational issues. Re-organisation had been discussed before. The setting up of a semi-autonomous body had first been suggested in the 1930s and again in the 1950s, when it found favour with many politicians. The basic argument in those times was directed to the

success of Bord na Mona (The Irish Peat Board) and that of the Electricity Supply Board (Durand, 1969). However, nothing was done.

Convery (NESC, 1979) was convinced that the Civil Service dual management structure was not the best structure with which to handle State forestry in Ireland and wrote that a two-tier system exacerbates the natural "territorial imperative" instincts, which are a feature of all organisations. He proposed a Governmental initiative to produce an organisational shift from the Civil Service framework to a more modern, integrated and effective management system. UPTCS (1983) stated that State forestry should be a productive business concern rather than a service organisation. That publication also pointed out that forestry activities were being carried out by a field organisation with administrative staff predominantly employed at a headquarters, while the majority of the professional and technical staff worked in the field. This last point, it was emphasised, tended to intensify the division which a dual management structure creates between administrative and professional/technical staff.

The terms of reference given to the Review Group were: (1) to examine the present structure, organisation and operation of the Forest and Wildlife Service of the Department of Fisheries and Forestry; (2) to consider what changes, if any, are necessary; and, (3) to make specific recommendations on such changes.

Reporting in November 1985, the Review Group proposed that State forestry should be run on commercial lines. Among its findings it reported that the FWS had no clear mandate to operate commercially; and, that the FWS, integrated into a Government Department, had a management structure that

hindered it from being run as a profit-conscious business. The Group recommended that the organisation be restructured within the Civil Service and proposed the setting up of a commercial body, called the National Forest Enterprise which would have the status of a commission.

However, announcing its plans early in 1987, the Government decided to establish a commercial state-sponsored company. The Forest Service was separated from the Wildlife Service, moving to the Department of Energy in 1987. The Forestry Bill passed through both Houses of the Oireachtas during 1988, becoming the Forestry Act, 1988. The company also acquired its name at this time: Coillte Teoranta – The Irish Forestry Board.

Coillte was launched in December 1988, while the company came into being on 1 January 1989. The 11 January 1989 saw the appointment of Martin Lowery as Chief Executive (Irish Forestry, 1989: Issue 1 of this Volume).

Ireland's State forestry had entered its own perestroika.

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