

# Society Activities

Minutes of the 30th Annual General Meeting, 4th March, 1972, in the Shelbourne Hotel

The outgoing President, Mr H. M. Fitzpatrick, opened the proceedings and welcomed those present. The Minutes of the 29th A.G.M., having been published in the Journal, were taken as read, and were signed. The Council Report for 1971 was read and as a result it was hoped that two issues of the Journal would be published in future. The adoption of the Council report was proposed and seconded by Messrs. Kilpatrick and Hanan.

The Treasurer, presenting the Abstract of Accounts, commented on the increase in the cost of printing and postage, and stated that it was largely due to the cost of printing the Constitution and Index. He also commented on the £200 increase in advertisement, and regretted the necessity of having to cash the Prize Bonds. On the question of the Society's Book—"The Forests of Ireland"—it was stated that 846 copies had now been disposed of, 35 having been disposed of in 1971.

In a discussion which followed the Treasurer's report it was generally regretted that the Prize Bonds had been cashed and that no honorarium had been paid to the Council members. It was stated that for the past number of years the Society was spending more money than it was earning, and steps would have to be taken to remedy the situation. The steps suggested were to increase the membership and reorganise the Journal so that it would pay for itself. The Editor pointed out that during the year a Constitution and Index were printed, neither of which carried any advertisements, and whether or not the Journal pays for itself will depend on the number of advertisements it will carry. It was also suggested that the membership fee should be increased, otherwise only one issue of the Journal be published.

It was proposed by Professor Clear and seconded by Mr. M. McNamara that the Statement of Accounts be adopted.

Mr. Fitzpatrick then read the result of the 1971 Council election:

President: Dr. W. H. Jack.  
Vice President: Dr. J. F. Durand.  
Secretary: Mr. J. P. Connelly.  
Treasurer: Mr. F. Mulloy.  
Editor: Mr. N. O'Carroll.  
Business Editor: Mr. M. Sharkey.  
Auditor: Mr. D. M. Craig.

**Councillors:**

Technical: Mr. G. Hipwell.  
Mr. T. V. O'Brien.  
Mr. J. J. Prior.

Associate:

Miss E. Furlong.  
Mr. S. Galvin

The Chair was then taken by the incoming President, Dr. Jack, who paid tribute to Mr. Fitzpatrick for the excellent job he did during his term as President.

Dr. Joyce, Meetings Convener, outlined the Meeting Programme and stated that the Annual Study Tour would take place in West Cork from 12th to 16th June.

The President then urged the members to attend as many of the Society's functions as possible, and as there was no further business, he brought the Meeting to a close.

J. P. CONNELLY (Hon. Sec.).

## COUNCIL REPORT FOR 1971

Following the glare of publicity received by the Society of Irish Foresters in 1970, due to Conservation Year, the Society in 1971 returned to its more usual activities.

*Meetings:* A full quota of indoor and outdoor meetings were held. Considerable progress was made in increasing attendances. Particularly successful were a number of seminars held during the Winter months. Forest walks held in September indicate that there is a public demand for this type of educational meeting.

*Study Tour:* The Annual Study Tour was held in Counties Fermanagh and Tyrone. The participating party which was based at Belleek enjoyed a very informative tour. Our thanks are due to The Northern Ministry of Agriculture who organised the tour, and for their generous hospitality.

*A.G.M.:* The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held at the Royal Dublin Society on 13th March, the minutes of which were written up in Volume 28 No. 1, of the Journal. Dr. W. E. S. Mutch of Edinburgh University read a very interesting paper on Forest Economics-Evaluation for Rural Development.

*Library:* The Society supplied the National Library of Ireland with a set of available journals.

*Examination:* Two Candidates presented themselves for the Woodman's Certificate. Both were successful. One Candidate presented himself for the Foresters Certificate.

*Journals:* An index to Journals was circulated to all members. Two issues of the journal were published during the year. The first of these was No. 2 of Vol. 27, the volume for 1970, which had been delayed. Because of financial difficulties which developed during the year the Council decided to restrict the journal to one issue during 1971. Since the decision was not made until after publication of that issue it is marked Volume 28, No. 1.

*Election:* Elections were held for the positions of Vice-President and Counciller Technical (3 posts). Whereas polling was higher than usual many members did not avail of their voting rights.

*Financial:* The running expenses of the Society have increased considerably in the last number of years. Due to this it was necessary to increase membership fees to £2.50, in the case of Technical Members and £2.00 in the case of Associate Members.

*Council Meetings:* (Six Council Meetings were held during the year). Attendance at Council Meetings were as follows: Messrs H. M. Fitzpatrick; M. E. Cassidy; J. F. Durand; M. Sharkey and P. M. Joyce, 6 meetings. Miss E. Furlong and Mr. J. Prior, 5 meetings. Messrs R. O. Cinneide; E. Joyce; N. O'Carroll and D. Walsh, 4 meetings. Dr. W. H. Jack; Messrs M. J. Sheridan and W. G. Dallas, 2 meetings.

7th February, 1972.

J. P. CONNELLY  
Secretary

## PUBLIC BUSINESS

The main item of public business was an address by **M. X. LeChatelier**, of the E.E.C. Commission, Brussels, entitled *Forestry in the European Economic Community*. The address is printed in full elsewhere in this issue. The vote of thanks was proposed by Dr. Pierce Ryan, Deputy Director of The Agricultural Institute. The first point that struck him, he said, was the difference in scale between European forestry covering 22% of the territory, compared with about 4% here. There is also the difference in ownership referred to by M. Le Chatelier—with 58% of forests privately owned in the E.E.C. and only 10% in Ireland. A third difference is in the mean age of the forests. Most of ours are recently planted, the age pattern of forests on the Continent is more uniform. It may be therefore that Community regulations on forestry are quite unsuited to our situation.

Production from Irish forests is as yet quite small and economies of scale have hardly begun to operate. We have protected the wood processing industry with relatively high tariff barriers—as an infant industry capable of development. The general level of tariffs on these products which we will have to accept on becoming members of the E.E.C. may be considerably lower than those we at present have—implying increased competition for our wood processing industries and a tendency towards lower prices. The production advantages obtained from our climate and soils for certain types of timber ought to outweigh these disadvantages.

A more pressing problem for Irish forestry may well be the increasing cost of land as a result of joining the E.E.C. The price of land is determined of course by the income likely to be derived from it. In the E.E.C. the income expected to be derived from Irish farmland is expected to increase spectacularly. Selling prices for beef and mutton in the E.E.C. are confidently expected to be 50% and 70% above corresponding Irish prices in 1970. Costs are not likely to increase to anything like the same extent, with the result that gross margins should increase—even at present levels of production. But the major bonus of E.E.C. membership for farming is expected in the environment for expansion which it will create and the expected intensification of production which will follow—giving even better gross margins. The White Paper estimates that the volume of output of beef will rise by half a million head by 1978 and the volume of milk output will increase by over 50%. These increases are easily attainable provided the capital is provided. Certainly with existing technology our grasslands are capable of supporting many more cattle.

Rational policies of land-use have to take account not only of production possibilities arising from climatic or soil factors but of economics and business. The basic problem with regard to Forestry is the length of waiting for a return on capital. The gross returns, when discounted to the present, give low returns—often less than that for unimproved agriculture. Gross margins per acre in agriculture are likely to improve significantly upon our entry to the E.E.C. and the economic or accounting balance may be tilted against forestry—even in good forestry areas like Leitrim. The multi-purpose use of forests and the creation of forest parks is therefore to be welcomed. So also is M. Le Chatelier's news about expenditure from the Guidance and Guarantee Fund to finance certain forestry schemes. I would like to know, however, from him whether these grant can be made to a State Forest Corporation or are they designed for private forestry only.

Another point we should like to have clarified is the possibility of replacement of much of the traditional wood market by synthetics. The statistics give a ro picture—of continuing deficits in the market, exactly the sort of environment

encourage the development of substitutes. We have seen some of this development in the furniture trade. What is the official opinion of the possibility of such development, say in the paper trade?

In seconding the vote of thanks, **Mr. T. McEvoy**, Inspector General, Forest and Wildlife Service, Dublin, wondered was it French or E.E.C. courtesy that induced Monsieur Le Chatelier to convert to our Irish, Imperial or British units at a time when we are in the process of metrication. Our next Forest Report will be in hectares and cubic metres—and so one obstacle in the path to Europe will be removed!

We are indebted to Monsieur Le Chatelier for the first authoritative elucidation of forestry problems in the E.E.C. It is all the more welcome because the Government's booklet "The Accession of Ireland to the European Communities" is silent on this topic and there has been little public discussion. Last Autumn the Agricultural Science Association did have a discussion with contributions from the late H. J. Gray and a representative of the forest products industry but tonight's discussion gains enormously from Monsieur Le Chatelier's contribution, his presence and willingness to answer questions.

I must also express my personal pleasure at meeting again one who has become a familiar and respected figure—and indeed, a friend—at various assemblies in Europe—Rome, Geneva, Strasburg, Brussels.

Let me begin my comments by referring to the forestry policy background in the Republic. Unlike many Irish industries, we in forestry have for many years accepted the idea of free international trade in forest products and we have worked on the basis of establishing here a forest estate and a forest industry which would stand on its own feet without protection or subsidy. The old policy of self sufficiency (*Sinn Féin*) went long ago and we look forward to producing in time an export surplus. In fact already in the particle board and fibre board sector, there is a substantial export trade to Britain and elsewhere.

It follows that the E.E.C. external tariff on forest products (3-13%) is for us an "unconvenanted benefit" and will improve our position in, say, the particle board market which is now of great importance to us as the main outlet for current forest produce i.e. thinnings.

Our confidence in this approach to entry to E.E.C. is built on several factors.

The first is the inherent advantages we in Ireland possess in our soil and climate for the rapid growth of certain coniferous species, especially Sitka spruce, from the American Pacific coast. Our yields are only seldom attainable on the European Continent and in Britain obtainable only in the western parts.

M. Le Chatelier has given the European average as 36 H. feet, of which 26 is industrial.

Our state forests have an average yield class of 126 representing a production of 107-115 H. ft. This is a figure which we expect to improve on as we eliminate low yielders like Contorta Pine (inland and Lulu) and Scots Pine on unsuitable sites. The aim since 1967 has been Yield Class 160 and this has been attained in land acquisition over the last 5 years.

Second point is as follows—Allied to this advantage in growth rates is the trend in the wood market in favour of small size trees. In Europe the traditional rotation for conifers of up to 150 years yielded prime, clean timber of large dimensions but the market for such timber has become less and less attractive. Large sizes for structural use have been replaced by steel and concrete and more recently by laminated beams made up from smaller timbers. The European market for saw timber generally has grown only slowly—at one third the rate for small sizes. So much so that by 1980 the proportion of large to small will be 3:4 i.e. 25% more small timber than large and 50% more in the British market.

1980 and beyond is what we in Ireland must be concerned with as our forests expand and our main production will after year 2000.

This trend towards more processed timber favours our produce—nobody asks whether pulp or particle board is home grown so long as it reaches standard specification—and our particle board has a very high reputation abroad. As Monsieur Le Chatelier inferred this trend also favours more processing and employment at home and a more favourable balance of trade.

A third factor in our favour is geography. We are located beside the world's greatest import market for wood and wood products—in fact we are part of it. As has been pointed out, Europe is a timber deficit area. So is the E.E.C. as it exists today and it will be even more so with the expected accession of the new members next year. Britain is the greatest single national market for wood imports and her forest policy envisages meeting only one third of her needs. At present she produces only 8% by volume of her requirements. In 1970 wood products ranked 4th on her import bill at £561 million.

Fourth point I wish to make is—we have some advantages deriving from the unified ownership and planned management of some 90% of our forests by the Forest and Wildlife Service. This allows for economies of scale and a planned development of industry to absorb the increase in output. For in tance, we now have a good forecast of forest production up to year 2000 and beyond which has been made available on a regional basis to all forest industries and the Industrial Development Authority.

Our existing forest properties may seem small and scattered by comparison with some of the larger European forests (Schwarzwald etc.) and even more so by comparison with forests of the American Pacific coast and of its South Eastern States. Also the costs of harvesting may tend to be higher due to topography, terrain, rock and peat. But time and rotation length—the obverse of growth rate—remain the greatest cost element in the price of wood delivered at the processing plant—and we have the advantage here. And our forests are still expanding so that ultimate size will be quite large. For example, County Wicklow has an area less than 30 miles square but already has 70,000 acres (13%) of forest and it is still expanding.

My general conclusion is that if we are efficient, if we are careful of our overheads and adapt mechanical equipment to our site peculiarities and if, above all, we get the right land in the right place, we have nothing to fear.

This latter point regarding land brings me to the inter-relationship between agriculture and forestry. I accept that we cannot choose forest land in isolation from other use alternatives. Land use must fit a pattern which best serves the total national interest. It may well be that the balance of advantage on certain marginal sites will change with the better agricultural prices in the E.E.C. We can hardly ignore, however, the facts of what is now happening within the E.E.C.—the great movement away from farming on marginal lands and the concentration on the better arable lands in favourable climatic situations. If and when we enter the E.E.C. I would be surprised if the same forces do not begin to operate here. In the long run E.E.C. agricultural policy is not designed to favour high cost producers, and farmers on marginal land tend to be just that if you cost their time at full labour rates. Further I would expect the subsidies to agriculture to be concentrated in product prices and the subsidies in reclamation grants and other production aids to be gradually eliminated. Professor O'Donoghue (who is now economic adviser to the Taoiseach) referred in 1970 to these aids as economic distortions: for instance a drainage reclamation project is decided on the basis of the farmer's return on his contribution, which may be only one-third of the national cost.

Taking into account the present small size (in income terms) of farms on

marginal land, the inherent unfavourable agricultural factors and the proposals for retirement pensions and retraining schemes for farmers (aided by the E.E.C. Agricultural Fund and the State), I would be surprised if in the long run considerable further areas of good forest land were not released for afforestation, especially in a community threatened on the one hand by agricultural surpluses and alarmed on the other hand by a growing wood shortage.

I see no problems of a serious nature in the directives on genetic and external quality of seeds and plants or in the phytosanitary regulations now under consideration.

Finally it gives me great pleasure on my own behalf and on yours to thank Monsieur Le Chatelier for coming from Brussels and giving us such a clear picture of forestry in E.E.C.

M. Le Chatelier then answered some individual questions, and in reply to Dr. Ryan's query about grants from the Guidance and Guarantee Fund he said that such grants were not available for state forestry.

In conclusion **Dr. W. H. Jack**, President, addressed M. Le Chatelier, saying: "Au part de nôtre Société des Forestiers Irlandais il faut que je vous présent nos sentiments tres agréables. D'abord parce que vous nous avez parlé en anglais comme un indigène et aussi parce que votre discours était si intéressant et si utile."