

EDITORIAL

Planting for Profit

The recent publication of the National Economic and Social Council's document on Irish forest policy brings good news for all engaged in forestry here. For the first time it has been stated by an impartial expert that forestry has been a good investment for the state. It is the conclusion of Professor Convery, author of the NESC study, that "state forestry investment has been and is financially in the social interest, showing a real rate of return in the range of 3 to 6%". This is an attractive rate of return in real (i.e. net of inflation) terms, well up to the return from the best alternatives open to the government. It seems that at last we are emerging from the long shadow cast by Roy Cameron, who, as director of FAO's European Forestry Group, visited Ireland in 1950 and produced a report advocating a major expansion of forestry in the West of Ireland. That this has been carried through is obvious as are the regional benefits in employment, etc. which have been achieved. But this proposal was based on the assumption that forestry in this region could never yield a reasonable rate of return and thus was to be seen as playing a social role, providing employment in economically depressed areas. While never formally adopted by the government, the social role of forestry has provided a comfortable refuge to which harried foresters could retreat during arguments on profitability, up to the present day.

Now it is no longer necessary for foresters to be on the defensive. Forestry has come a long way in thirty years. It can make a significant contribution to the wealth of the nation. It has the potential to make a greater contribution. We can now identify the best forest land. What's more, we know what it's worth. We know that, as an investment, good land, despite the greater initial cost, is far more attractive than low quality sites requiring large expenditure to achieve adequate yields. What is required now is for the government to pursue a policy directed at concentrating forestry development, whether in state or private ownership, on high quality forest land located around centres suitable for integrated industrial processing operations. In this they should have the support, not only of foresters, but of all those interested in the prosperity of the nation.