

*EDITORIAL*

## Promoting Private Forestry

Economic analysis have shown that forestry is a good investment. However, not all of our forests are equally rewarding in financial terms. Even though it costs more to buy good forest land it is a much better investment than poorer, cheaper sites where productivity is lower and, critically, rotation is longer. There are many reasons why state forestry cannot confine itself to the best sites in the most productive tree-growing areas of the country. Nevertheless, the relationship between site type and financial return should be borne in mind by all who are concerned to see the money invested in forestry well spent.

Private forest estates represent one source of good forest land which is not realising its full potential at present. The area of privately owned forest in the Republic is 82,000 ha, in Northern Ireland 14,000 ha.<sup>1</sup> This land is for the most part of good quality yet productivity is very low. The proportion of hardwood crops is high and much of the standing crop is well beyond the age of maximum M. A. I. A large proportion of the forest area in private ownership is totally unproductive. Over 40% is scrub land in the Republic, 12%<sup>1</sup> in the North. The forest services promote private forestry by means of planting and scrub clearance (in the Republic) grants and technical advisory service. However, with the lapse of the free scrub clearance scheme in Northern Ireland, private planting has fallen to a very low level. In the south, the response to the scrub clearance scheme has never been good and nowhere is there a scheme to encourage the utilisation of overmature stands.

What is required is a vigorous promotion campaign involving a revised system of grants and a comprehensive advisory service for private forestry. The reasons for the reluctance of private owners to fell their mature stands are social and historical rather than economic. They often feel they do not have the expertise even to approach the problem nor the incentive to look for advice. Ideally there should be a forestry advisor to whom they can turn and who himself is dedicated to promoting the development of private woodlands. It may be questioned as to whether this should be the responsibility of the forest services. It might be better to have a forestry advisor appointed to ACOT (in the Republic) in each county, thereby making the service an integral part of the local agricultural and horticultural advisory service. The advisor would thus become known as such and identified with an established advisory service.

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication, Mr. Cecil Fitzpatrick, Chief Forest Officer, Northern Ireland Forest Service.