

Submission to Review Group

The setting-up of the Review Group was considered by Council to be one of the most important events in Irish Forestry for many years. It gave the Society an unprecedented opportunity to express its views concerning the future of forestry in the country. Council met twice to prepare its submission. At the first meeting the ideas which the Council wished to put forward were developed. A draft submission was subsequently prepared by a small group and this was revised and augmented at the second meeting.

The document was not sent to individual members before submission because it was felt that this would be impractical and because individual members could make their own submissions to the Review Group. The submission is printed here, in full.

Editor

SUBMISSION FROM THE SOCIETY FOR IRISH FORESTERS TO THE REVIEW GROUP ON FORESTRY

Wood is a basic renewable resources produce in forests which, because of their long production cycle, must be protected, maintained, managed for maximum output, and extended where appropriate.

The Society of Irish Foresters was founded in 1942 with the object to "advance and spread in Ireland the knowledge of forestry in all its aspects". The Society has a membership of 650 which is comprised of the majority of professional foresters in state, semi-state and private organisations. There is also a substantial number of members associated with sawmilling and private forestry.

The Society wishes to comment on forestry in Ireland today with particular reference to:

- (1) Market Research.
- (2) Irish Forest Production and Potential Productivity.
- (3) Employment.
- (4) Management of Forest Resource.
- (5) Research Needs.
- (6) Multiple Use of Forests.

1. Market Situation

Ireland supplies approximately 20% of its present demand for wood products. Production forecasts from the Forest and Wildlife Service indicate that timber production from both state and private forests will lead to self sufficiency in conifer wood by the turn of the century.

However, wood imports constitute 60% of the total EEC consumption representing a cost of 13,000,000 ECU to the Community. On a global scale there will be a substantial increase in the demand for wood and wood products from a constant or diminishing forest area.

In responding to the terms of reference set for the Review Group, the Society suggest that many of the difficulties which have arisen might have been avoided if the Minister had set up a Consultative Committee as authorised by Section 10 of the Forestry Act of 1946.

2. Irish Forest Production and Potential Productivity

The mild wet climate of Ireland is well suited to the growth of many coniferous species. This fact gives the country a very significant comparative advantage over all other EEC countries. In terms of forest productivity, one hectare of land in Ireland will produce the same amount of wood as four hectares in other EEC countries. Moreover, in the context of acid deposition, which is assuming greater significance over much of Europe, Ireland is particularly favourably located and unlikely to incur any reduction in forest productivity. Planning for the wood based industries has assumed that an annual planting programme of 10,000 hectares will be maintained. The Society views with concern the failure to meet this programme in recent years, in view of its predictable effect on the supply of industrial raw material. As site quality is of the utmost importance on the level of supply, the traditional attitude towards the afforestation of marginal land should be altered. This will require a vigorous and sustained public education programme to highlight the value of forestry to the Irish economy and the need for a rational use of the land resource. In this context farm woodlots could contribute significantly to local wood and energy demands.

3. Employment

The current employment level in forestry is 7,000 people. This figure covers in-forest operation, harvesting, transport, pulpwood processing and sawmilling. With the maintenance of the 10,000 ha afforestation programme, employment would reach around 15,000 in the early part of the next century. Forestry has provided productive employment and thus maintained infrastructure in many

remote areas where agriculture alone could not provide economic livelihood. Forest industries are located near forest and therefore the wealth generated stimulates further rural development. Experience in other countries has shown that the forest enterprise is particularly suited to development by committees or co-operatives.

4. Management of the Forest

The primary aim of forest management is the achievement of a sustainable yield, which means a never-reducing supply of the renewable resource to the wood processing industries. To ensure the orderly management and maintenance of the forest resources, it is essential that the ultimate control factors such as protection, proper exploitation and regeneration, which influence sustained yield, must be vested in the state. This should be seen as a separate function from the operation of a forest enterprise, which may be under the control of such diverse interests as the state, semi-state, private companies or individual owners.

5. Research Needs

The level of resources available for forest research in the Republic of Ireland has not been adequate to meet the demands of a pioneering enterprise for both state and private sectors, and this shortfall will be even more pressing in the future.

6. Multiple Use of Forests

The main objective of the forest enterprise is the production of wood. However, there are many economically unquantifiable recreational benefits such as orienteering, hill walking, shooting and other such activities, which are provided without loss of wood production.