

Editorial

Ireland's forests are regarded as a natural resource by the politicians and public alike but it is a resource that has not developed by itself alone. Virtually every tree that we see in our forests today is planted, every cubic metre of timber harvested has been the result of the skill and effort of a previous generation of forest workers and their managers.

In the year the Society of Irish Foresters was founded some 1,800 ha were established and 134,000 m³ of timber harvested. Today, fifty years later these annual figures have increased to 21,000 ha and 1,930,000 m³ respectively.

Ireland is now supplying 55% of its constructional timber and is self sufficient in palletwood. By the turn of the 21st century it will be a net exporter of timber. This is a remarkable achievement by any standards and the Society of Irish Foresters has, over the years, played a significant role in this success story.

Since its inception in 1942 the Society has pursued the aim of 'spreading the knowledge of forestry in all its aspects'. Field days, symposia, study tours, forest walks, exhibitions, evening meetings and publications have been the means by which the Society has accomplished its objectives. Generations of Society members and associates, have benefited from these efforts, not only by being informed of current events,

but also, by providing a social forum which bound the profession together and raised the image of forestry in the public eye. Much of this work, however, was accomplished with little publicity.

Times are changing. The formation of a large State commercial forestry company – Coillte, the emergence of the private sector as a significant force in forestry and the greater awareness of environmental values by the public are events that will greatly impact on forestry in the coming years. The Society, as the main body of professional foresters within the country, is in a unique position to take a responsible position to influence and guide the development of the sector by providing informed opinions on forestry policy and practices that are in harmony with the environment and will lead to the sustainable development of the resource.

The next fifty years of forestry will certainly be very different from those past. No longer will the Society continue to be the sole organisation with an interest in forestry in this country. Other organisations are emerging, and if the Society is to continue to play a significant role in the development of the sector in the next fifty years then it must adopt a higher public profile than in the past.

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