

## THE ROLE OF ENGOs IN PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIVE WOODLAND POLICY, CREATING AWARENESS AND INSTIGATING CHANGE

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An Taisce - the National Trust for Ireland, was established over 50 years ago and is the broadest environmental non-governmental organisation in Ireland. An Taisce has been a statutory consultee under the Planning Acts since 1963. Since then, other consultative responsibilities have been added to our remit, including commenting on Integrated Pollution Control Licence, Waste Licences, aquaculture licences and most recently forestry consent applications.

This paper will examine An Taisce's response to the development of the Native Woodland Scheme since its inception, and will consider some aspects of the new forestry regulatory regime as introduced on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2001 by the European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations, 2001.

This legislation removed initial afforestation from the planning acts, and initial afforestation is now 'exempt' from planning permission requirements. A new forestry consent procedure, governed by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, allows for public participation in the consent process through a system of public notification, via local newspapers with a period for comment. Provision has also been made for consultation with specific bodies including the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Heritage Council and An Taisce - the National Trust for Ireland.

The new regulations lower the thresholds for mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment from 70 to 50 hectares. Provision for requiring an EIA below the threshold has also been included where there may be significant environmental impacts.

An Taisce, is a statutory consultee under the new Regulations. The paper will compare the legislation's effectiveness in implementing elements of the National Forest Standard and Code of Best Forest Practice, both of which have been developed in order to implement sustainable forest management principles in Ireland.

### Introduction

This paper outlines the role of Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOs) in promoting the development of native woodland policy in Ireland, creating awareness and instigating change in the forestry sector. When examining recent advances in the native woodland sector the following questions are pertinent:

- Has there been a role for ENGOs in promoting the development of woodland policy?  
and
- Have ENGOs had a role in creating awareness and instigating change?

The theme of the Native Woodland Conference is the past, present and future of Ireland's Native Woodlands. This paper concerns policy development, including policy development aspects of the Native Woodland Scheme, and some aspects of the new Forest regulatory regime under the Environmental Impact Assessment (Amendment) Regulations 2001.

Since 1963, An Taisce has been a statutory consultee under the Planning Acts. As well as waste licences, IPC licences, and aquaculture licences, An Taisce are now consulted on forestry consent applications.

An Taisce has been involved, as a committee member, with the Irish Forestry Certification Initiative, Woodlands of Ireland, The Peoples Millennium Forests, The Tree Council of Ireland and has made submissions to the Forest Service on Ireland's National Forest Standard. An Taisce was a member of the plenary committee and made submissions to the earlier document 'Growing for the Future'. The Project Unit within An Taisce runs the Leaf programme. Learning about Forests (LEAF) is an international programme that aims to encourage schools, classes and teachers to use forests for educational activities.

## ENGOS in Ireland

ENGOS are in the main, a small, fragmented, weak, and financially under resourced sector in the wider framework of woodland policy. Considering their current marginalised position in Irish society, it is worth looking at the environmental movement's main ENGOS with forestry in their brief.

The following listing is not in order of importance:

- 1 An Taisce,
- 2 The Woodland Trust (Northern Ireland)
- 3 Crann
- 4 Voice
- 5 The Tree Council of Ireland (TCI)
- 6 The Irish Wildlife Trust
- 7 Muintir na Coille - Coppice association of Ireland
- 8 Birdwatch Ireland
- 9 Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC)
- 10 Keep Ireland Open
- 11 Networks for Nature (NfN)
- 12 The Woodland League
- 13 Forest Friends
- 14 Conservation Volunteers Ireland (CVI)
- 15 Just Forests
- 16 Irish Coalition for Sustainable Forestry
- 17 Irish Seed Savers Association
- 18 People against Pesticides (PaP)
- 19 The Woodlands of Ireland Group (Wol)
- 20 Friends of the Irish Environment (FIE)
- 21 Earthwatch -Friends of the Earth Ireland
- 22 Feasta

Other groups are associated with specific local forestry issues, such as the Mote Conservation group and of course some individuals and consultants have been influential both in the past and the present.

Some of the 22 named ENGOS function with working volunteers; some have retired from the fray, but they all have had their place in the development of Irish woodlands policy. But how have they influenced policy?

One person, whose influence was dramatically important, and who used her influence and knowledge for the benefit of Woodlands in Ireland, in particular, was Freda Rountree, former Chairperson of Crann and the Heritage Council. More than any one else, her achievements should not be forgotten. She seized the opportunity presented by the celebration of the new Millennium to become a driving force behind a project on native woodlands that would bring the issue of native woodland conservation to every household in Ireland. She worked diligently to promote the establishment of the Woodlands of Ireland Group and the Peoples Millennium Forests.

'The People's Millennium Forests' is the title given to a project to restore and create native woodlands that was initiated in the year 2000 to celebrate the start of the third Millennium. The purpose of the project is to ensure that all generations, present and future, can enjoy the benefits of Ireland's native forests. The project is sponsored by AIB Bank plc and the Irish Government and is managed by Coillte Teoranta in partnership with Woodlands of Ireland. The Woodlands of Ireland group represents statutory and non-Governmental organisations actively involved in promoting native forests.

Freda galvanised people, the Heritage Council, the agencies, the Government Departments and the result has been a measurable improvement in the protection, promotion and establishment of native Irish woodlands.

## Irish Forestry

Forest cover in Ireland extends to some 660,000 ha - almost 10% of the country's land surface. Plantations comprise by far the largest part of the forest area, i.e. more than 95%. Forestry is a relatively recent land use in Ireland. The high percentage of exotic tree species in commercial plantations presents a serious challenge to sustainable forest management in Ireland.

A key component of Ireland's current forest policy is to encourage farmers to afforest agricultural land, at a rate of 20,000 ha per annum to achieve a forest area of 1.2 million ha or 17% of the land area by 2030. Government grants and annual tax-free premiums are the primary instruments used to encourage this policy. The overall aim is to reduce surplus agricultural production in the EU. At the same time this policy will support rural development by ensuring a source of income to the sector. This policy can be found in the National Development Plan 2000 -2006.

Problems have arisen in so far as farmers have responded by planting mostly poor, unproductive land. Up to two thirds of the land planted had some deficiency, either a physical or nutritional limit, which was overcome by site preparation and/or the application of fertiliser. Forestry is also by its nature, an activity, which presents particular difficulties in the area of funding. Typical minimum periods of rotation mean that the period between investment in the establishment and critical early management of plantations and the generation of a return on that investment, is very long relative to most areas of economic investment and thereby constitutes a disincentive to investment (Bacon 2004).

Where market forces are driving policy on forestry, ENGOs, which by their very nature are outside the market, can have very little influence on policies as outlined previously. Most volunteers in the sector realise this, yet with the blind enthusiasm of the deeply committed, they have continued to work and lobby about the importance of native woodland habitats, the threats to their existence, the EU regulatory system, biodiversity, and the risks inherent in a flawed cost/benefit analysis of the sector.

In April of this year Peter Bacon and Associates, economic consultants, carried out a consultation with everybody involved with the Forest sector (Bacon, 2004).

The terms of reference from the Department of Agriculture were

- 1 Review the operation of the existing strategic plan for Forestry in Ireland i.e. Growing for the Future
- 2 Look at the potential changes in land uses arising from the review of CAP and existing schemes.
- 3 Look at the nature and economic effects of the funding mechanisms, with a view to seeking the best value for money.
- 4 Review timber market developments; this will incorporate non-timber benefits of forestry and environmental requirements. Under this heading the consultants also considered carbon sequestration.

An ENGO approach to such a review might seek other values as well as those highlighted above. The values in sustainable forest management as laid down in the Irish National Forest Standard do not preclude value for money, but seek environmental integrity first. A dedicated unit within the Forest Service could be set up to protect the unprotected, the proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs), undesignated areas with biodiversity value, i.e. afforested heath vegetation, scrub, road corridors, green ways, small stands 3-5ha in size and birch regeneration on cut-away bog.

Policy is required to retain functioning flood plains and to protect unmanaged riparian/wet woodland. It is also urgently required in development plan policies to include full integration of a biodiversity framework for sustainable development, where there is a presumption against clearance of broad-leaved woodland for other land uses, the protection of ancient semi-natural woodland and for multiple use forestry. When developing policy, ask the question: 'what can offer the greatest environmental benefit?' A review of the non-timber benefits of forestry would highlight the value of conserving habitats, of protecting biodiversity, of planting the right tree in the right place and of the beauty to be found in a landscape that is appropriately planned and planted. Economic benefits would flow from this to communities both rural and urban. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EU Habitats Directive would be better understood, and management plans would now be in place.

The Department of Agriculture and Food stressed to Peter Bacon the need for *innovation* in the sector. Yet the Native Woodland scheme (NWS) - which is set to establish 15,000ha of new woodland and proposes another 15,000ha of existing woodland for restoration - was curtailed due a budget cut in 2003 and 2004. The NWS is certainly an innovative Scheme set against the background of a forest sector dominated by coniferous plantation forestry.

To quote Minister Hugh Byrne on the Scheme's launch: "This scheme is perhaps one of the most eagerly awaited in recent years. Native woodlands are among Ireland's most valuable habitats and today form an important part of our heritage, culture and landscape. The scheme will ensure that Irish forests continue to provide rich and varied habitats for native flora and fauna in addition to fulfilling important social, economic, recreational and landscape functions."

The NWS – a new, innovative and evolving package - represents a major step forward for the Irish forest industry in terms of securing the future of our threatened native woodland resource, implementing sustainable forest management and meeting Ireland's commitments under the EU Habitats Directive and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. ENGOs are happy to participate in this process and help evolve this new way of working through partnership.

The process, which Bacon and Associates propose to use for their review of forest policy, is largely driven by economic considerations. The consultants stated that they wish to look forward and deal with current and emerging issues conceding that decision factors in forestry are complex. ENGOs feel sidelined and frustrated by this kind of process, which excludes them while simultaneously appears to consult with the widest range of bodies possible.

## Conclusion

The BIOFOREST project is a large-scale five-year project, running from 2001 to 2005, with the aim of addressing some of the gaps that exist in the current information on biodiversity in Irish plantation forests. The project is funded through the National Development Plan by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Council for Forest Research and Development (COFORD) as part of the Environmental RTDI Programme 2000-2006.

As part of the BIOFOREST project, a review of existing practice in Ireland, in relation to biodiversity assessment of sites to be afforested, is being carried out. For this, the project is reviewing all the EISs, which have been submitted in relation to afforestation projects. There are only 9 such EISs in the ENFO collection.

During 2002, 280 afforestation applications were received for consultation by An Taisce and this year, a grant from the Heritage Council was received to carry out site audits of afforestation applications. The overall objective of this proposal is to undertake site visits, on randomly selected afforestation applications, in order to determine the impact of the afforestation on local heritage. The results will bolster the methodology already in place and allow An Taisce to fulfill its prescribed role for afforestation applications, using limited resources. The audit will examine adherence to the afforestation application and approval conditions issued

by the Forest Service, as well as adherence to the suite of Forest Service environmental guidelines. The information gleaned from this process, will be published, including data on how many afforestation applications received are equal to or greater than 50 hectares.

An Taisce requested details of applications submitted that are within SACs, and copies of decisions in relation to these applications. It is stated that all applications within SACs are refused, but access is refused to any information on these applications. The above paragraph needs to be clarified. Given that a public consultation and prescribed consultation procedure was introduced on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2001, An Taisce submits that a transparent system has been established by statute which should allow access to decisions made in relation to environmental planning i.e. afforestation and that article 13 of S.I. 538 provides for notifications to be formatted in a manner that would not divulge 'personal information'.

To conclude it is important to examine the original questions posed at the outset:

- Has there been a role for ENGOs in promoting the development of woodland policy?  
and
- Have ENGOs had a role in creating awareness and instigating change?

The following quote from one ENGO sheds some light on existing attitudes. "Well, sure, but Government policy is a very powerful instrument and I don't see you rocking the boat by seeking a change in policy." The Forest Service actual broadleaf planting from their own database for the last two years is given as 15.3% and they are now telling Brussels that they are upping their target to 25%! This is a meaningless gesture – 15,000 new hectares over seven years – little more than 2,000 hectares a year, when the target will be 25% of 20,000 hectares or 5,000 hectares a year. Does this *woodland* planting come out of the 15.3% that was planted in the last two years? These are questions that need to be addressed.

The Native Woodland Conference, hosted by an ENGO, i.e. Woodlands of Ireland, has been an important step forward in raising awareness and encouraging communication between native woodland stakeholders. The conference has raised the profile of native woodland conservation in Ireland and illustrated that this is a high priority issue for a broad range of people.

## References

Bacon, P. & Associates, 2004 *A Review and Appraisal of Ireland's Forestry Development Strategy*. Department of Agriculture and Food

## Structure

The organisation normally employs one full time Project Manager. A Steering Group provides support and guidance on key initiatives and management of the organisation. This Steering Group represents a broad spectrum of interests and includes representatives of the Heritage Council, the Forest Service and the National Parks and Wildlife Service in addition to ENGOs, state bodies, foresters and ecologists. Steering Group meetings provide an open forum for discussion resulting in a focussed approach to native woodland conservation and management.

A Technical Advisory Group consisting of over 25 experts in various aspects of native woodland ecology, management and conservation, provide support on specific technical matters that arise. This recently included input to the development of a guide on the silviculture and economics involved in managing native woodland for wood production within the context of the Native Woodland Scheme. The publication entitled: *Realising Quality Wood from Ireland's Native Woodlands* will be published in the near future by Woodlands of Ireland.

## The People's Millennium Forest Project

The prospect of the new Millennium in 2000 generated much interest and debate on how best to celebrate the occasion. At the time, the Government formed the National Millennium Committee (NMC) to identify and provide funding to worthwhile projects. The aim was to engage the general public and positively contribute to local community development. Woodlands of Ireland availed of this opportunity and proposed a project that would highlight the importance of native woodlands as a valuable component of our natural heritage. The People's Millennium Forests Project was to become the flagship of the NMC.

The scope of the proposal was beyond the capacity of Woodlands of Ireland, which had only one full time employee. The NMC agreed to support the project but recommended that a suitable partner be sought to effectively manage the initiative. Coillte Teoranta kindly agreed to become a partner and with the support of the NMC, AIB, and the Forest Service, 16 sites were carefully selected for native woodland restoration. A detailed description of the management of the project is covered in M. Doyle's paper 'Restoring native woodlands: The experience from the People's Millennium Forests Project' (this volume).

Although the People's Millennium Forests Project has largely been implemented, a number of long-term tasks are ongoing. These include a long-term monitoring project to assess woodland succession in four of the millennium woodlands and the development of a native woodland database under the auspices of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

## The Native Woodland Scheme

Following the People's Millennium Forest Project, the native woodland movement had gained momentum and was strengthened by increased public awareness. In 1999, Woodlands of Ireland submitted a proposal concerned with the grant-aiding of native woodland conservation and creation, to the Forest Service for consideration. The Native Woodland Scheme evolved as a direct result of this submission and was officially launched in 2001. This scheme - developed and implemented in partnership with Woodlands of Ireland, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Regional Fisheries Boards and a host of other relevant bodies - offers grants and annual payments to landowners to conserve and enhance existing native woodland and to create new areas of native woodland. The scheme's scope and flexibility allow for a wide range of innovative approaches, such as the implementation of continuous cover forestry, the encouragement of natural regeneration, the conversion of non-native forest to native woodland status, the clearance of invasive species such as rhododendron, and the development of riparian native woodland corridors along our rivers and lakes. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the scheme is that it offers a mechanism, after centuries of decline and neglect, to actually start increasing the area of native woodland cover in Ireland and to appropriately manage remaining woodlands.

The scheme also plays an important role in fulfilling our national and international obligations under the Wildlife Act (1976), the Wildlife (Amendment) Act (2000), the EU habitats directive and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

Woodlands of Ireland's Technical Advisory group worked closely with Forest Service staff to develop the grant scheme and to compile a Native Woodland Scheme manual. Wol are actively involved in the provision of Native Woodland Scheme training courses, which are ongoing. Details of the Native Woodland Scheme are comprehensively covered in K. Collins paper 'Funding a future for Ireland's native woodlands: The development and application of the Native Woodland Scheme' (this volume).

### **COST Action E27**

COST is an intergovernmental framework for European Co-operation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research, allowing the co-ordination of nationally funded research on a European Level. COST Action E27 was established in 2002 to harmonise the wide range of protected forest area categories used in European countries within the context of existing international systems of protected areas. The main objective of this action is the improvement of information on protected forest areas in Europe, reporting mechanisms and harmonisation of key terms. Wol are members of this Action and regularly attend COST E27 management committee and working group meetings.

### **Roadside Planting - National Roads Authority**

The National Roads Authority is currently developing a protocol for the management of roadside verges. Wol has provided technical advice on the ecologically sensitive management of roadside verges and the use of native tree and shrub species. Roadside plantings represent an opportunity to develop linear native woodlands across the country and to conserve our indigenous gene pool. Wol will closely monitor this project and continue to provide technical support as required.

### **Rural Environmental Protection Scheme**

There is considerable scope for inputting to the management guidelines for woodlands on farms under the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS). Although Wol have attended consultation meetings with the Department of Agriculture and Food in May and June 2003 during the review of REPS and submitted a position paper on semi-natural woodlands on farms, a native woodland option has not yet been incorporated into REPS.

### **Irish Forestry Certification Initiative**

The Irish Forestry Certification Initiative is a process that aims to:

- Advance sustainable forest management in Ireland
- Develop a certifiable forest management standard for Irish forests based upon the principles and criteria of The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)
- Engage the general public and relevant interest groups in the development of the Irish FSC standard

Woodlands of Ireland was elected to the steering group of IFCI, on the social chamber in 1999. In the last year considerable progress has been made in the forest certification process. Declan Little of Woodlands of Ireland and currently Chairman of Irish Forestry Certification Initiative Ltd. (IFCI Ltd.), recently reported that virtually all 10 FSC Principles and associated criteria have been reviewed by the Technical Working Group, which is comprised of representatives from the 4 constituent chambers of IFCI Ltd. When the revised draft standard is completed it will be circulated for public consultation. IFCI Ltd. is a member-based organisation and members are affiliated to chambers according to member profile and chamber definition.



## Public Relations

It is not the intention of Woodlands of Ireland to promote itself widely as there are numerous woodland-related organisations in the field. However, it is important to ensure that the forest and conservation agencies, in particular, are aware of our activities. Woodlands of Ireland regularly update native woodland stakeholders through its quarterly article in 'Crann magazine' and on the official website: [www.woodlandsofireland.com](http://www.woodlandsofireland.com). Information on native woodlands, Wol activities and upcoming events are posted on the website.

## Conclusion

The success of the Native Woodland Conference in September 2004 represented a major initiative at raising awareness and highlighting the importance of conserving and expanding Ireland's native woodland resource. The fact that over 270 people attended the conference over four days is a clear indicator that the conservation of native woodlands is an issue that is high on the agenda of a broad range of interest groups. Over 30 lectures presented by the leading experts in native woodland conservation and management from Ireland, the UK and mainland Europe are presented in this publication.

One of the key areas to be addressed in future includes the development of riparian woodland management expertise and training courses. Although Ireland is in the nascent stages of native woodland conservation and establishment, current indicators point to a bright future. The 2005 budget for the Native Woodland Scheme will determine the work programme for the year ahead but a significant increase on last year's funding allocation is expected. The Native Woodland Scheme has evolved considerably since it was first launched in 2001 and is currently being reviewed within the Forest Service.

Woodlands of Ireland will continue to influence the development of native woodland policy; support the progression of the Native Woodland Scheme and identify other opportunities for native woodland restoration and establishment in Ireland.

## Acknowledgements

Woodlands of Ireland wish to thank current and previous Project Managers including John O'Reilly, Declan Little and Cara Doyle and the members of the Steering and Technical Advisory Groups who have contributed to the organisation and its initiatives since its establishment in 1998. Wol is particularly grateful for the generous financial support of the Heritage Council, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government) and the Forest Service (Department of Agriculture and Food). Woodlands of Ireland furthermore wish to convey our gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of the conference especially the organisational and editorial committees.

## References

Doyle, M. Restoring native woodlands: The experience from the People's Millennium Forests Project (*this vol.*)  
Collins, K. Funding a future for Ireland's native woodlands: The development and application of the Native Woodland Scheme (*this vol.*)