

# FORESTRY in NORTHERN IRELAND

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CONSULTATION PAPER

JUNE 2002



An Roinn Talmhaíochta  
agus Forbartha Tuaithe

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Department of Agriculture  
an Lannart Oncum

# F O R E W O R D

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We know that what happens to the world's forests has an impact on climate change. The people of Northern Ireland are all part of that picture because everyone uses paper and timber. Each year we use five times as much wood as is produced from our own forests.

Most of our wood and paper comes from other countries. This encourages trade with other nations including developing countries. There are of course issues in ensuring that the timber comes from properly managed and regulated forests. There is a great deal of work going on between national governments, industry and environmental organisations to find mechanisms to ensure that this is so. Our industry is playing its part.

We have a responsibility to look after forests in Northern Ireland. Each year we produce 20,000 lorry loads of coniferous timber and we make 2 million visits to our forests. The forests improve our environment and quality of life. Our forests are slowly expanding and their character is becoming more environmentally friendly. Each year, we spend over £7 million net of timber sales in looking after forests and in support of forest expansion, plus £13 million in capital charges.

*Forestry in Northern Ireland* is a consultation paper about forest policy. It describes the options and makes recommendations on many aspects of forest policy. The paper complements the objectives set out in the *Programme for Government* and addresses the forestry issues in *Vision* for the future of agriculture. As you read the paper I hope you will see how forestry can contribute to the Regional Development Strategy, to sustainable development, to conserving and enhancing biodiversity, and promoting social inclusion. However you may feel there is more to be done. I will be particularly interested to receive your views on how forests should be developed in terms of the emphasis given to industry, to the environment and to social needs. I am also keen to hear your views on the desirable extent of forestry over the next ten years or so, within the limits of what is affordable.

*Bríd Rodgers*

**Bríd Rodgers**

Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development

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# S U M M A R Y

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## INTRODUCTION

1. Over 30 years ago the then Government of Northern Ireland published its policy on forests in the White Paper (Cmd 550), *Forestry in Northern Ireland*. Much has changed over that period in terms of policy and the resultant forestry programmes. Consequently it is now time to review progress and determine the direction of future policy.

2. This document points to what we think are the main issues, questions and options which will inform the development of forest policy in Northern Ireland. Where the analysis points towards a particular course of action, we have identified this as a policy recommendation by using bold italicised text. However we wish to test the recommendations by seeking your comments on these, and about any other aspect of forestry development which stakeholders wish to raise. Your views will be carefully considered as part of the review process. In due course the Northern Ireland Executive will issue a statement of forest policy.

Please make your responses in whatever format is easiest for you. We will try, to accommodate requests for a meeting with a representative of the Forest Service. We can also make provision to meet requests for accessible formats such as large type, audio cassette or in a language other than English.

## Achievements of the Operation of Existing Forest Policy 1970-2000

3. Since the 1970 White Paper, there have been major changes in national, European and international forest policies which have affected land use and development in general. The emergence of new environmental standards and codes of practice have been particularly influential and the forestry programmes reflected these changes. An analysis of the costs and benefits of the economic, social and environmental programmes since 1970 is provided at pages 16 and 17 of this paper.

## Use of Forests Today.

4. Forests in Northern Ireland have expanded to 83,000 hectares which is 6% of our land area. This is low in comparison to other countries (Republic of Ireland 10%, Scotland 17%, Wales 14% and England 8%) and particularly so when compared to the European Union average of 36%. The dominant species is now Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis* (Bong.) Carr.) which is well adapted to our mild, wet climate and infertile soils. Other tree species are planted to add diversity to the environment and particularly where soil conditions are favourable. Currently more than half of all new



planting is with broadleaves, most of which are native species. The vast majority of forests are state owned and around half of the forest lies in Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh. We use that land for timber production, for improving our environment, and for accessing the countryside. Our impact on global forests is much larger; each year we consume forest products (paper, timber, wood based panels) equivalent to the production from an area one third the size of Northern Ireland. Forests have an important balancing effect on the global climate, and they provide many different products. Of these, timber, pulp, paper and panel products are the most important traded commodities. Consequently, many of the mechanisms to safeguard forests concentrate on the trade in wood products. Some of the most effective mechanisms are market driven, focusing on the link between agreed standards of forest management, timber production, and the manufacturing and supply chain that results in forest goods arriving in our shops. In Northern Ireland most of our forests have demonstrated that they have achieved the standards prescribed for sustainably managed forest.

## Developing Forest Policy

5. Current forest policy in Northern Ireland is:

- The sustainable management of our existing woods and forests; and
- A steady expansion of tree cover to increase the many diverse benefits that forests provide.

6. Although forestry in Northern Ireland is a devolved responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive, *policy development should be guided by the international and European agreements and commitments entered into by the United Kingdom Government (Paragraph 5.1)*.

7. The powers for forestry development in Northern Ireland are contained primarily in the Forestry Act (Northern Ireland) 1953. However the Act does not itself define forestry, and administrative definitions were developed. The definition of forests used by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation is couched in terms of land use. This definition allows comparison with other forestry regions. The definition covers “forest”, “other wooded land”, and “trees outside the forest”. *There is merit in restricting the scope of forest policy to land used for “forestry” and “other wooded land” only ( Paragraph 5.2).*

8. Aspects of forest policy are likely to be cross cutting between the responsibilities of the majority of Northern Ireland departments and their agencies. *There is therefore a need to agree the scope of forest policy between departments and define responsibilities for delivery of the agreed policy (Paragraph 5.2).*

## KEY ISSUES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

9. Forests offer opportunities for industrial development, social development for exercise and enjoyment of the countryside, and enhancement of our environment. We also have limited opportunities for planting new forests. In a few cases we may wish to replace forests with other forms of land use, where this would be of greater benefit to our society. *Forest policy should seek to realise the maximum benefit to our society from past investment and make proper provision to hand on an adequate area of forest to meet the needs of future generations. It should also focus on how forests can improve the life and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland ( Paragraph 5.2).*

## Sustainability

10. Since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, sustainable forest development has been an international commitment. In Northern Ireland, this has meant the sensitive and balanced management of forests to protect their health, vigour, productive and regenerative capacity, and their ability to produce a variety of economic, environmental and social benefits for present and future generations. ***Sustainability in management and development should therefore be the one strategic goal that underpins development of forest policy (Paragraph 3.1).***

## Economic Development

11. Existing forests have the potential to increase timber production to approaching 0.6 million m<sup>3</sup> per year and generate annual turnover of £35 million in sawmills and particleboard manufacture. Timber production from forests already contributes very significantly to the rural economy in terms of jobs and multipliers, especially in border areas. Given the increasing forest resource in Ireland and the potential for increased markets for the wood processing industry, there is an opportunity to pursue further investment in the industry, as a means of promoting industrial development and supporting and sustaining regeneration especially in rural areas. ***The policy recommendation is that the delivery of regional development opportunity through wood production should continue to be the main aim for most forests (Paragraph 5.3).***



## Forest Replacement and Expansion for Development

12. There is environmental and social pressure for less intensive methods of production, more woodland, more open space within woodlands, greater variety of tree species and greater age diversity. If met, these will lead to a long-term reduction in the area of productive forest. To secure any long term industrial investment in wood processing and the strategic need to protect employment opportunities in rural areas, ***there should be a presumption in favour of replacing productive capacity as it is harvested, so that existing woodland areas will be retained as woodland except where overriding public benefits would result from permanent deforestation ( Paragraph 5.3.3).***

13. Currently each year we consume forest products equivalent to the production from an area the size of Tyrone and Fermanagh. A goal of self-sufficiency in forest products would therefore require a very significant change in land use. Northern Ireland is a small relatively densely populated region, and land is highly valued for agriculture. Consequently we are unlikely ever to be self sufficient in forest products. Instead ***we should continue to obtain most of our requirements for forest products by trade with other regions (Paragraph 5.3.3).***

14. There is an argument that forestry development should be compatible with that of neighbouring countries, such as the Republic of Ireland and Scotland, both of which have forest expansion strategies for improved industrial development. This would allow us to share in any future benefits gained from

creating a significant natural resource in this part of Europe. The rate of expansion is a critical issue that depends on affordability and the rate at which agricultural change can take place.

15. *Where forest expansion takes place it should be strategically co-ordinated with other land uses (Paragraph 5.3.3).* For example we should consider and draw conclusions on the extent, type and rate of any expansion of forest cover and location as part of a strategic examination, which attempts to reconcile different pressures on land used for other purposes such as agriculture, nature conservation or water collection.

## SOCIAL USE OF FORESTS

### Recreation and Tourism

16. Forests serve to enhance the range of opportunities for leisure in the countryside and offer increased choices for the development of tourism in Northern Ireland, especially in rural areas.

17. The attractiveness of Northern Ireland forests for out of state visitors depends on being able to integrate forest visits into the overall package that brings visitors to Northern Ireland in the first place. *Forests should be used to improve the attractiveness of landscapes and absorb visitors (Paragraph 5.3.2).* This will



require strategic investment to maintain and improve the attractiveness of existing forests and in new planting which improves landscape and creates opportunities for tourism in areas where there is a deficiency.

### Access to Existing Woodland

18. Different people have different problems in gaining access to forests. For some, it is the physical challenge of travelling on rough paths. For others, there may be no forest near by or it may be the cost of entry to the most popular forest parks. There are also issues around whether the public should enjoy the access benefits of forests as of right, and whether this would increase the sense of public ownership and participation in the life and management of our forests. Because forests are important in providing informal access to the countryside, *we should seek to reduce or remove the barriers to all sections of the community in accessing woodlands ( Paragraph 5.5.1).*

### Working for a Healthier People

19. The population of Northern Ireland is becoming more sedentary and is ageing. There are public health concerns in relation to the lack of exercise. Simple activities such as walking have an effect on this, and should be encouraged at all ages. Many people use woodlands for exercise, and these opportunities are particularly valuable where they are close to centres of population because they provide the enticement of a peaceful and pleasant environment. *We should encourage access to forests so that our people can take exercise to improve the standard of health in the population and to enjoy the benefits of a woodland environment. (Paragraph 5.5).* *We should also seek to make forests available to specialist users for sporting and other purposes where there is clear public value in so doing. (Paragraph 5.5 ).*

## Urban Forestry

20. New woodlands close to urban areas offer opportunities to screen development, define settlements and integrate urban land use with rural land use. There is a deficit in the amount of urban forest provision based on the target set for grant schemes. *Forest expansion is desirable to provide an adequate area of woodland offering public access, close to towns and cities ( Paragraph 5.5.2 ).*

## PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

21. On a world scale, forests help to counter the effect of global warming. Forests in themselves are an important ecosystem. They are also important because they interact with other parts of our environment in significant ways. Many of the interactions are highly desirable but there are issues about the impact of forests on habitat for biological diversity, conservation of open habitat and built heritage, landscape change, loss of water yield and quality and other environmental considerations. *Environmental protection, including environmental improvement and conservation of biodiversity should continue to permeate through forest policy (Paragraph 5.4 ).*

### Forests and Water

22. Forests are found in some water collection areas and in some headwaters of important fishing rivers. Forests in these areas are sometimes perceived to diminish water yield and increase acidity. Great care is needed to ensure that watercourses are not contaminated by forest operations. Current planting is on significantly richer ground, where the presence of tree cover is likely to reduce the nutrient load in water catchments by displacing agricultural use. *Forests are scarce in Northern Ireland, and should continue to be managed for timber production and receive the minimum intervention consistent with the need to grow and produce timber ( Paragraph 5.4.1 ).*

### Forests and Nature Conservation

23. Conservation of biodiversity represents an essential objective of sustainable forest management. Native woodlands in particular generate significant public interest as part of our natural heritage, and enjoy considerable support at all levels of our community. *Forest policy should encourage protection and restoration of ancient woodland sites, improvement of the biodiversity value of conifer woodland, and improved management of broadleaved woodlands. Forest expansion should aim to increase the area of broadleaved woodlands. It should also make specific provision for consolidating the most important woodland habitats and link woodland and other habitats together ( Paragraph 5.4.2 ).*

24. Some species of plants and animals not native to Ireland can, when introduced and established in woodlands, cause economic and environmental problems. As this is an area with high risk *there is a need for a review of the effectiveness of the controls on the introduction and spread of exotic forest species ( Paragraph 5.4.2 ).*

## Forests and Landscape

25. Forests often make a strong contribution to the interest and character of the landscape. Sometimes the forests are significant components in their own right. In other places they provide valuable screening for less attractive forms of land use. There is a need to promote new planting to soften the dramatic edges in some landscapes and to screen less attractive land uses. There are also opportunities for major areas of new forest to enhance the landscape and attractiveness for visitors. ***New planting and replacement of existing forests should add to the quality of the landscape in the most sensitive landscapes, and take account of the impact on the landscape elsewhere by adhering to high standards of design (Paragraph 5.4.3).***

## Built Heritage and Land Ancillary to Forests

26. The most important examples of archaeology, the built environment and ecologically important habitats fall within the ambit of policies on planning and protection of the environment. Where archaeological sites are not protected by statute, they are protected in accordance with government policy. Other examples of our natural and built heritage are not protected by statute and are closely associated with forests. There has been a link between forest expansion and conservation of valuable open habitat. ***Forest policy should continue to support the management of ancillary open land and the built heritage for objectives related to conservation and enjoyment of the countryside (Paragraph 5.4.4).***

## EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RESEARCH

### Investing in Education and Skills

27. Forests offer an important natural resource ideally suited for education, particularly of our children, on environmental issues and sustainable development. The participants in the forestry industry also need education and training to enable them to deliver the goods and services we require from forests.

28. The main users of forests for guided school visits are primary school children. Even greater numbers use public forests for social development, delivered as group activities. Adults are interested in the knowledge gained about sustainable development from forest visits. While the focus has been on children, forests also offer opportunities to educate adults for life long learning on sustainable development. ***We should continue to promote the use of forests in the social development and education of our children (Paragraph 5.6.1 ).***



29. There is potential for schools to develop a special interest in forests as a very visible example of complex integration of economic, environmental and social values to deliver sustainable development locally, while reflecting the global pressures that affect us all.

30. Forests are well used, and they provide a reasonably safe environment for these activities. ***The use of forests for education should be encouraged where it is practicable (Paragraph 5.6.1).***

## Education and Research for the Forestry Sector.

31. Although there are approximately 5000 forest owners in Northern Ireland, less than 500 people in Northern Ireland need specialist forestry skills and knowledge to service the forest industry. Additional people use forestry skills and knowledge in the agriculture, amenity horticulture and utilities industries.

32. Higher level qualifications in forestry are expensive to provide, and require greater numbers of students than are available in Northern Ireland. Our students should continue to seek admission to universities and colleges in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. There are greater demands for skills and craft courses, and *there should be access to skills and craft courses in forestry in Northern Ireland which lead to widely recognised qualifications (Paragraph 5.6.2)*. There should also be provision to meet the need for improved understanding of forestry by land owners. The arboriculture sector needs to maintain and improve its skills and requires access to training in Northern Ireland. The skills needed fall within a broader definition of forestry that includes working with trees outside the forest, and there is no other policy provision for this increasingly important sector of the economy.

33. There is a need to monitor and disseminate advances in forestry knowledge and to monitor the development and impact of our forests. There is also a requirement to support the research to ensure that the building industry can accept homegrown wood. *There should be provision for adequate research to support the contribution forestry can make to the economy, social development and the environment (Paragraph 5.6.2)*.

## Delivering Mechanisms

34. The major issue in implementing a revised forest policy is determining the respective roles of the public and private and voluntary sectors, and finance.

35. The essential driver for industrial development in Ireland is assurance of raw material supplies for a significant part of production needs. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development or Coillte Teoranta together own most of this timber resource, and significant quantities are maturing in the private sector in the Republic of Ireland. The state bodies can devise mechanisms for guaranteeing supply relatively simply. The choices are long term contracts for the supply of timber, sale of the rights to harvest timber on specified plantations for very many years, and outright sale of plantations. The choices have consequences for the delivery of non-timber benefits. Sustained delivery from the private sector is more difficult to organise as private owners may have different objectives.

36. Delivery of wider public benefits from forestry has been difficult to obtain unless it is provided directly from the public sector, or is supplied as a consequence of providing public support to the private sector, through grant aid. Apart from the Forest Service and the Environment and Heritage Service, the main providers have been charitable trusts or district councils. Private owners often benefit directly from environmental schemes, and are therefore more likely to participate in schemes aimed at delivering these benefits. Some benefits, such as public access, effectively prevent owners from enjoying an exclusive right to their property. Consequently securing public access in particular is likely to require continued public sector involvement in owning and managing property, although there are choices available about which type of public body should have delivery responsibility.

37. Most forest expansion can only occur by planting land that is currently in private ownership. The current pattern of state involvement is a result of past unwillingness by the private sector to get

involved in forestry in a significant way. Although there is now a healthy interest in private planting supported by grant aid the pattern of activity is very scattered.

38. Grant aid may continue to be a vehicle for effecting change in land use. The current approach in providing grant aid is to reimburse costs and compensate for agricultural income forgone. However to obtain some of the more important forestry benefits, such as forest consolidation and public access, there may need to be an element of public purchase. Because the current approach links incentives for planting to loss of farm income over very long periods, this could create large public expenditure pressures in future.

39. The alternative approach is to continue with direct public sector participation in land purchase, planting and management, particularly where there are strategic reasons for involvement. This approach can also store up large public expenditure pressures, but there are opportunities to transfer established forests to the private sector, to recover some expenses, and avoid others.

40. ***The preferred policy approach is that the private sector should play a fuller role in delivering forest policy in Northern Ireland (Section 6).*** The public sector should play a strategic role in acquiring land and establishing new forests to improve competitiveness and deliver public benefits. However, the private sector should become progressively more responsible for delivering economic benefits of forests.

## **SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS**

41. The main recommendations contained in this document are that the existing policy of managing forests in a sustainable manner should continue. The recommendations give substance to this by suggesting that the main thrust should be on developing the economic value of the timber resource, and promoting tourism. The private sector should become more responsible for delivering economic benefits of forestry. Development should be subject to constraints of conserving and protecting the environment. The recommendations suggest that access to forests for all should be encouraged, so that people can take more exercise and to encourage young people's education and social development. There is also a continuing need for access to forestry education and training to meet the needs of the industry.

# FORESTRY in NORTHERN IRELAND

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## CONSULTATION PAPER

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Over 30 years ago the then Government of Northern Ireland published its policy on forests in the Command Paper *Forestry in Northern Ireland*, (Cmd 550). That paper was written in the context of a need to address the problem of high levels of rural unemployment, and looked to a forestry programme that would create the raw materials needed to attract industrial development. The paper identified a significant area of agricultural land which had low productive potential and which could therefore be devoted to growing trees. In addition, forests were seen to offer recreational opportunities to the community and could make an important contribution to wildlife conservation. Against this, the costs of a forestry programme were likely to be high, and efficiency objectives were being emphasised in terms of the use of forests for the production and marketing of timber. Consequently, the White Paper saw a need for an expanded forestry programme that would sustain employment and create a resource big enough to attract industrial development in future. Delivery was to be mainly by the public sector because of the poor commercial prospects of forestry. A target of achieving 120,000ha (9% of land area) by the year 2000 was set, subject to quinquennial review.

Since 1970 there have been major changes in national, European and international forest policies and in the policies which affect land use and development in general. Forestry is once again a devolved responsibility of the NI Executive. The public investment that has taken place over the past 30 years is now bearing fruit in the increasing volumes of wood being harvested and the private investments in wood processing capacity. Woodlands continue to change the appearance of the countryside and are a major provider of recreation opportunity. There is an increasing need for consideration of alternative options for land use and diversification by Northern Ireland's farming community and the regeneration of rural areas. This is therefore an appropriate time to carry out a further comprehensive review of forest policy.

#### 1.2 Purpose of this Consultation Document and how to respond

By publishing this consultation document, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development seeks the views of stakeholders on the forestry issues, questions and policy options relevant to Northern Ireland. Where the analysis points towards a particular course of action we have identified this as a policy recommendation using bold italicised text. All comments received will be fully considered as part of the review process. In due course the Northern Ireland Executive will issue a statement of forest policy.

Please feel free to make your responses in whatever way is easiest for you. If you feel that you or your organisation has particular issues you wish to bring forward and would like to meet with a representative from the Forest Service please let us know by contacting Liz McWatters at the address below.

Responses to this consultation document must be received by **Monday 23 September 2002** and should be sent to:-

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Should accessible formats such as large type, audio cassette or in a language other than English be required please contact Liz McWatters and appropriate arrangements will be made as soon as possible.

This consultation paper is also available on the Forest Service Website at **www.forestserviceni.gov.uk/consultations**. You may also respond electronically by accessing the response link in the website or mailing your comments directly to **elizabeth.mcwatters@dardni.gov.uk**. In your response please indicate the people and organisation(s) you represent. We will acknowledge your comments and publish a summary of all the views received. Please also advise us clearly if your views are to be treated as confidential. If you do not tell us we will assume your response is open and a summary of your comments published.

### **1.3 Northern Ireland's Forests**

Forests in Northern Ireland cover about 6% of our land area. We use that land for timber production, for improving our environment, and for accessing the countryside. Our impact on global forests is much larger; each year we consume forest products (paper, timber, wood based panels) equivalent to the production from an area one third the size of Northern Ireland. We are aware that our consumption of resources has an impact on the world. As we buy goods so we look increasingly for assurances that the products we buy are from sustainable sources. Forests have an important balancing effect on the global climate, and forests provide many different products and services. Of these, timber, pulp, paper and panel products are the most important traded commodities. Consequently, many of the mechanisms to safeguard forests concentrate on the trade in wood products. Some of the most effective mechanisms are market driven, focusing on the link between agreed standards of forest management, timber production, and the manufacturing and supply chain that results in forest goods arriving in our shops. In Northern Ireland most of our forests have demonstrated that they have achieved the standards prescribed for sustainably managed forests.

We have choices about the future of forestry in Northern Ireland. Our present policy is to import most of our forest products from other countries. If we continue to do this, we can use our own forests to supply a small proportion of our timber needs, as well as supplying the existing range of environmental and social goods and services. Alternatively we can decide to supply less timber from our own forests,

and instead seek greater environmental and social benefits, for example by changing the nature of our forests or by restoring them to other habitats. We can also expand the forest cover of Northern Ireland to supply more timber, or environmental benefits, or social benefits. What we do depends on the balance we strike between economic development, use of forests for social purposes and care of the environment. That balance has to be within affordable cost. Currently most of the cost of forestry falls on the public sector, because the private sector generally has not been willing to invest in forestry. Most of the potential forestry land and all timber processing is in the private sector.

## 1.4 Responsibility for Forests

Forestry has always been the responsibility of the agriculture department. Currently, responsibility for forest policy rests with the Forest Service, which is an Executive Agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The powers for the forestry programmes have been contained primarily in the Forestry Act (Northern Ireland) 1953, as amended. The Act places a duty on the Department to maintain adequate reserves of growing trees. To fulfil this duty the Act empowers the Department to-

- acquire land by purchase or by leasing which is suitable for planting or for other forestry purposes
- sell, let, exchange or grant rights over land
- purchase or otherwise acquire standing timber and sell or dispose of timber owned by the department
- generally promote the supply, sale, utilisation and conversion of timber
- make grants for private planting
- establish and carry on or aid in the establishment and carrying on of woodland industries
- promote and develop instruction and training in forestry.

## 1.5 Forests and Agriculture

The Agriculture Acts of 1947 and 1949 contain powers in relation to the management of good husbandry of agricultural land, which can include the use of land for woodlands where this is ancillary to the farming of land for other agriculture purposes.



However the main link between forestry and agriculture is in terms of land that becomes surplus to farming needs and then is planted. When forests are small in relation to the size of farms, the linkage of forests to agriculture may be significant in terms of shelter for stock rearing, sporting use and improvement of the environment. However, most planting in NI occurred when the Department bought entire farms. Consequently, forests have developed independently of agricultural management. As the size of forests increases, so the interaction with farming and other land uses changes. When forests become significant at a landscape scale then there is a focus towards industrial exploitation of natural resources, forest based ecology and use of forests for public access. Land with trees is managed to produce timber, for recreation, and as a significant and distinctive part of the landscape and the environment in which farming, tourism and urban development takes place. Sometimes the scale of forestry in rural areas increases to the extent that individual farms become isolated. While this simply reflects broader trends in the rural economy, there are important social and economic costs for the individual families concerned.

## 2. REVIEW OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF POLICY 1970-2000



Over the period forests expanded by 60% to 83,000 hectares (ha). The dominant tree species is now Sitka spruce which has shown that it is well adapted to our mild, wet climate and infertile soils, although it does require additions of mineral fertilisers on many sites. This is the main timber producing species and accounts for a large proportion of the 3.8 million cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>) of timber produced since 1970. Annual production is now approaching 0.4 million m<sup>3</sup>, or 10% of total production in Ireland. This production directly generates total value of sales by primary processors of £38 million annually, (sawmills, boardmills) of which £24 million is attributable to the value of timber grown in Northern Ireland, and

950 jobs. The primary sector (growing, sawmilling, boardmills) feeds a secondary wood using sector (furniture, builders, carpentry etc) which has value of sales of £240 million in Northern Ireland.

Other tree species are planted to add diversity to the environment, and particularly where soil conditions are favourable. Currently more than half of all new planting is with broadleaves, most of which are native species.

The net economic cost of the 29,000 hectares of state forestry planting and replanting since 1970 was £57.2 million. The cost of maintaining state woodlands planted before 1970 (31,000 hectares) and still in existence in 2000 was £13.1 million. In addition, since 1970, 10,500 hectares of grant aided private planting took place. By extrapolation from public sector costs, the economic cost of private sector expansion was £12.5 million over the period. Therefore the total cost of the forestry programme since 1970 has been £82.8 million. This estimate excludes those costs specifically incurred for recreation provision and conservation purposes and any regional development costs and gains from the processing of timber.

The land planted and replanted over the period could have remained in or been reclaimed for agriculture. Estimates of the value of removing this land from agriculture range from a benefit of £13.2 million to a cost of £1.9 million, depending upon the approach taken to estimating the value of agricultural production. There was a benefit from removing land from agriculture on a direct output basis, after removing the effect of subsidies. On the other hand, if conacre rents are used there was a small cost, after adjustment for CAP subsidies.

Consequently, the net resource cost of the forestry programme was between £70 and £85 million. This is equivalent to between £4.9 and £5.9 million annually. The exchequer cost is about £1 million per year greater, reflecting the payment of grant aid to encourage private planting. Most of this was compensation for loss of agricultural income, and is justified by the better quality of land under private forestry than in the state sector.

Taking account of the employment generated the overall value added by the forestry and wood processing industry is in excess of £10 million a year.

The programme has delivered social benefits of access to the countryside of the order of 2 million visits each year to publicly owned forests. The economic benefit of visits to Forest Service properties expressed in terms of "willingness to pay" is £2.0 million<sup>1</sup>, compared with a cost of providing the service of £1.5 million.

<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson, Scarpa, Chilton and McCallion (2001). *Journal of Agricultural Economics* Vol. 52 No. 1

Woodlands and ancillary open space make a significant contribution to conservation of the environment. There are some 900ha of woodland included in 19 candidate Special Areas for Conservation, 16 National Nature Reserves in state forests and 35 Forest Nature Reserves. Several species have benefited from the forestry programme either because they were woodland species, or able to adapt to woodland and enjoy the protection afforded by the new habitat. Other habitats and species have suffered from the forestry expansion programme, particularly in relation to planting of peat. Much of this damage happened in the early part of the programme. During the latter part of the programme the overall impact of planting was environmentally neutral. The broad stakeholder view was that the emphasis and balance of the programmes developed since 1970 were in general accordance with the wishes of forest users. Positive support was expressed for continuance or enhancement of the programmes. Limited sampling of households revealed a willingness to pay for an expansion programme of public forestry. Based on expansion at a rate of 600ha per year, this was provisionally valued between £15 million and £20 million annually<sup>2</sup>.

In summary therefore the cost of growing timber is not met by the sale of timber, but there is significant value added in the processing sector in Northern Ireland from this economic activity. There are 950 jobs in the forestry and wood processing industry, which is less than had been forecast in 1970. This reflects both the significant improvements in operational efficiency and the reduced scale of the programme. Forests do provide an important social benefit in terms of access to the countryside worth £2 million annually, and benefits exceed costs by a substantial margin. They are also important for conservation and enhancement of the environment particularly as standards are defined and applied and greater selectivity is applied to avoid the most sensitive and important habitats for non-forest use.

Overall, the programme has made a contribution which would not have happened otherwise and represented value for money. The public estate is now valued on a replacement cost basis at £216 million, of which £135 million is the cost of growing timber. Together with a contribution from existing privately owned woodlands, forests in Northern Ireland have the potential to support a 50% increase in the output of our sawmills and boardmills.

### **3 ISSUES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF FORESTS**

#### **3.1 Setting the Scene for the Future.**

Since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, sustainable forest development has been an international commitment, although not legally binding. In Northern Ireland, this has meant the sensitive and balanced management of forests to protect their health, vigour, productive and regenerative capacity, and their ability to produce a variety of economic, environmental and social benefits for present and future generations. *Sustainability in management and development should therefore be the one strategic goal that underpins development of forest policy.*

The previous forestry programme increased forests to cover 6% of the land area. This is still low in comparison to other countries (Republic of Ireland 10% Scotland 17%, Wales 14% and England 8%), and low in comparison with the EU average of 36%. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) manages three quarters of forests in Northern Ireland, half of which lie in Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh.

#### **3.2 Economic Development of Existing Forest**

Existing forests have the potential to increase timber production to approaching 0.6 million m<sup>3</sup> per year and generate value of sales of £35 million in sawmills and particleboard manufacture. Timber production from forests already contributes very significantly to the rural economy in terms of jobs and multipliers especially in the border areas. Given the increasing forest resource in Ireland and the potential for increased markets for the wood processing industry, there is an opportunity to pursue further investment in the industry, as a means of promoting industrial development and supporting and sustaining regeneration especially in rural areas.

#### **3.3 Social Development of Existing Forest**

The Forest Service commissioned work from consultants to examine the demand for visits to forests. This produced useful advice on the need to improve access to forests for under-represented groups, including disabled, young and older people, and for those living in socially disadvantaged areas. Meeting these needs would also increase the opportunity for improvements in healthy living for our people through exercise, and improving understanding of the environment and the need to achieve development which is sustainable between generations.

#### **3.4 Environmental and Heritage Protection and Development**

Forests make an important contribution to enhancing the landscape and ecology of Northern Ireland. There are several reports and landscape surveys that provide guidance about the scope for qualitative improvements to the forest environment. The report by the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group titled "Recommendations to Government for a Biodiversity Strategy" identifies those habitats and species that it considers are particularly important for conservation action. The Group's recommendations related to the management and protection of existing woodland are referred to at Box 1 below. The publication of a biodiversity strategy as the Executive's response to these recommendations is currently awaited.

**Box 1.**

- Protect, enhance and extend Ancient Semi-natural Woodlands.
- Sustainable management of commercial woodland plus increased research on biodiversity in conifer woodland.
- New woodland inventory.
- Provide and disseminate information on biodiversity.
- Stronger controls on loss of woodland.
- Increase woodland cover, especially native broadleaves.
- Develop a strategic approach to forestry policy.
- Restoration of open habitats.

Box 2 describes the semi-natural woodland types in Northern Ireland which have habitat action plans associated with them under the UK Biodiversity Strategy.

**Box 2**

WOODLAND HABITATS	EXISTENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND
Upland mixed ashwoods	Widespread but limited extent
Upland oak	Local and limited extent
Wet woodland	Widespread but limited extent
Lowland woodland pasture and parkland	Local

Future forest policy may also have an impact on other priority habitats and species. We have a duty to assess the impact of changes in land use due to both afforestation and deforestation. The legislative requirements that apply to any individual scheme are summarised in Box 3.

**Box 3**

The Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 prohibit the carrying out of any work or operations in relation to projects involving afforestation, deforestation, forest road works and forest quarry works, depending upon the nature, size and location of the project and it having a significant effect on the environment. The Regulations do not apply to development permission granted under the legislation on town or country planning.

However, the direction of forest policy itself is even more important, because this will set the criteria for future assessments. Box 4 shows an initial assessment of the potential impact of forest expansion on the most susceptible habitats.

**Box 4****Impact of Forest Expansion on Biodiversity Interests**

Most of the land outside urban areas on to which forestry could expand is currently farmed. The Agricultural Census of Northern Ireland classifies farmland into hill or rough grazing, grassland and arable.

- Hill or rough grazing 154,000ha

It is technically possible to grow plantation conifers on most of this land below about 300m elevation. None of it is suitable for growing broadleaves for timber production or for biomass plantations. However about half of it could support native woodland.

The Recommendations to Government for a Biodiversity Strategy describe eight priority habitats that are likely to lie wholly or partly within this land use. Because of the extent of these habitats there is little or no hill land or rough grazing where forest expansion would not conflict with the conservation of these habitats.

- Grassland, less than five years old 140,000ha
- Grassland, more than five years old 700,000ha

Virtually all this land is suitable for most types of forestry. Less than 2% of this land use is likely to be a priority habitat. The creation of new woodlands on this class of land would not conflict with the conservation of biodiversity.

- Arable 65,000ha

This category includes land used for growing cereals, other field crops and under set-aside. Most of it is suitable for growing most types of woodland. The field margins of land under cereals is a priority habitat for biodiversity conservation.

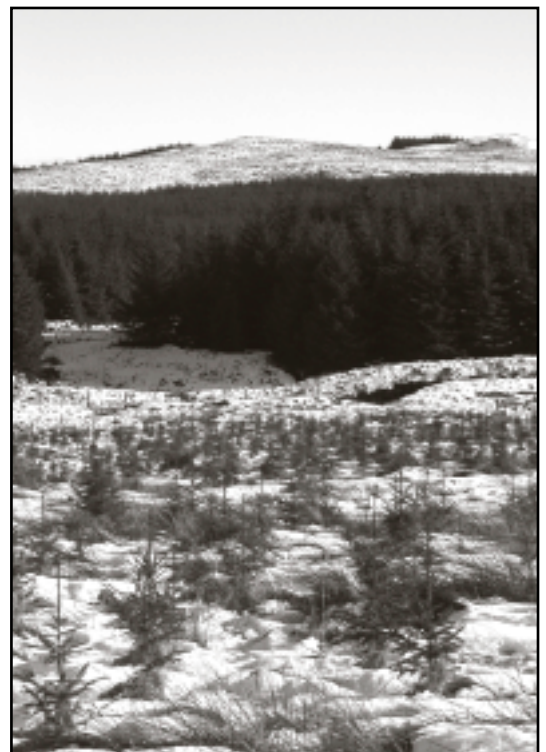
- Urban 111,000ha<sup>3</sup>

Where land is available in urban areas the majority of it is suitable for most types of new woodlands unless it is heavily polluted. There are no priority habitats for biodiversity conservation within urban areas.

The scale of land holding by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development means that significant natural and built heritage is in public ownership. This was acquired ancillary to forestry. Much of this requires little other than continued protection but some, such as formally designated wildlife sites, require positive management and there is a general need to improve the accessibility, presentation and interpretation of these assets. Other assets, such as Gosford Castle, require substantial expenditure to preserve their fabric or restore them to productive use.

### 3.5 Forest Expansion

There is a demand for new woodlands, shown by private planting at a current rate of 650 hectares per year, and additional land is available for planting as farmers offer their land for sale. New planting creates further opportunities to augment productive capacity and improve efficiency. It creates new resources to meet new demands for wood energy, to vary the impact of forestry on the environment, and to target existing and anticipated social needs that the previous programme did not satisfy. It also requires striking a balance between retaining the existing character and quality of our environment, and agreeing the extent and



quality of change in land use that we are prepared to accept. While it is unlikely that land use change will occur quickly, nevertheless forestry is a very long-term commitment that requires significant capital investment. Consequently, the forest industry needs clear guidance on what it is expected to achieve in the medium term.

### **3.6 Issues for the Future Development of Policy**

The fundamental issues are how to maximise the benefits flowing from past investment; what kind of forest should replace existing forest; and whether there should be a programme of forest expansion. This would have to be affordable in the light of other priorities and plans set out in the Programme for Government.

**Q1 Are the main issues correctly identified, or are there other questions which we should address?**

*Section 4 considers the options and necessary actions for maximising benefits from timber. Section 5 considers how benefits other than timber can be maximised and the extent and nature of future forestry programmes.*

## 4 DEVELOPING THE FOREST PRODUCTS INDUSTRY.

### 4.1 Current Industry

The Forest Service commissioned advice<sup>4</sup> on the development options for the wood and wood products industry. The primary forest industry in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland comprises sawmills and wood-based panel mills. There is a large secondary industry of furniture manufacturing. There are no pulp mills.

The annual outputs of the primary forestry sector in Ireland, north and south (value added on the basis of delivered prices) are estimated at -

Growing, harvesting and delivering timber	£ 79 million
Saw-milling	£ 58 million
Wood processing (panel mills)	£103 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>£240 million</b>



About 5000 people are directly employed in this primary sector. In addition, there are some 6000 forest owners, whose contribution to harvested volumes will grow significantly as their forests mature. The Northern Ireland contribution is 10% in terms of volume of wood supplied, 16% in terms of value added and 19% in terms of employment. 'Further processing' in Ireland, including furniture plus builders, carpentry and joinery employs over 15,000 people and value of sales exceeding £600 million, of which Northern Ireland contributes close to 40%.

The sawmill industry operates in a most competitive environment. Its main advantage is that it sells over 70% of production in its home market. There are export opportunities to Great Britain, which the Northern Ireland mills are developing.

The wood-based panels industry in Ireland comprises five manufacturers, one of which is in Northern

Ireland producing particleboard. The wood-based panels industry is very export orientated and only particleboard manufacturers retain more than 50% of production in Ireland. The Irish panel industry faces severe international competition in its key exports markets as well as domestically. Technical innovation and new large-scale mills are quickly eroding their cost competitive position.

All parts of the industry chain are operating in highly competitive and tough market conditions. Profitability is low and ultimately the ability of the forest sector to sustain economic growth is in doubt.

### 4.2 Industry Options

The timber resource in Ireland will increase by almost 1 million m<sup>3</sup> over the next 5 years. This expanding resource base is sufficient to support development for increased production of particleboard or medium density fibreboard (MDF), or to support paper manufacture. Most of the resource is in the northern half of the island and consists of Sitka spruce. There is an opportunity to expand the existing value chain of

forest to sawmill to board and secondary processing. Alternatively, an exclusive chain can be created of forest to sawmill and forest (plus sawmill residuals) to paper manufacture.

Investment in modernising saw mill plant, and expanding capacity, is underway and the new capacity is capable of absorbing the increased saw-log potential in the northern half of Ireland. This sector will remain the best paying market for good quality saw-logs for years to come. There are challenges in terms of improving penetration and competitiveness in the traditional markets of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. Significant supply volume increases in these regions will probably result in low quality saw-logs being redirected to panel or pulp and paper opportunities.

While the industrial base for processing additional saw-logs is well advanced, those for processing additional wood residues and small round-wood in Northern Ireland are still to be realised. Critical issues are the cost of wood fibre, cost of capital and cost of distribution. For new industries, including the paper option and MDF, people skills are also critical. Some Irish panel mills are comparatively new, but others need significant investment to improve competitiveness and meet current environmental standards.

Criteria of paying potential for the timber growers, investment potential for industrial investors and value added to the regional economy were set for evaluating the options. These are summarised in table 1 below.

**Table 1 Evaluation of forestry development options**

Criteria	Wood Products	Enhanced Wood Products	Paper
Paying potential for timber growers	Low	Low	Medium
Capital Intensity – Capital Risk	Low	Low-Medium	High
Value added to the regional economy	Low £67.5 million	High £285 million	Medium £105 million

The Wood Products option builds on an existing skills base and has potential (under ‘further processing’) to involve significant numbers of small to medium enterprises often in rural areas. The option has a low wood paying capability but has existing links, which underpin profitability of the saw milling industry. There are opportunities to re-write the business structures in the supply chain, to reduce costs. This option has the greatest prospect of attracting inward investment.

The Paper option produces commodities for use mainly outside Ireland. Benefit to local communities would be more focused on those close to the mill facility.

The development options are one-off opportunities, which once taken will not arise again for decades. There is a strong element of timing, and action is needed now if Northern Ireland is to capitalise on these opportunities.

Under current economic conditions, the industrial development options are likely to create additional public sector costs. This is because of the need to supply timber at a price that does not fully reflect the costs of growing and replanting harvested forests. Most parts of the Northern Irish and Irish industry remain under severe pressure. The highly integrated nature of the industry means that, for example, the

pressures on the particleboard sector have an immediate impact on the sawmill sector because of the need to dispose of sawmill residues economically. These pressures are likely to feed through as reduced prices for logs.

The challenge is to maintain or increase wood production in a way that decreases public expenditure on wood production. The available strategies for achieving this include continued improvement in efficiency, changes to the technical standards and processes for maintaining and regenerating forests, and appropriate transfer of responsibility and risk to the private sector.

Further efficiency gains are certainly possible within the sector, but there is some doubt that they can achieve the magnitude of saving required. Greater focus on costs is likely to improve accountability for the costs of growing timber, the costs of improving the environment, and the costs of providing social benefits from forests.

Changes to technical standards driven by emphasis on cost reduction would result in more extensive forest management. This would imply greater reliance upon natural means of regenerating forests, and accepting much longer periods for successful regeneration and growing timber than we have been accustomed to. It is also likely to lead to a change in the species composition of forests, and reduced timber productivity in the long term. There may be environmental gains from increased species diversity, and loss of social benefits as access becomes more difficult. The risks of failure are also likely to increase due to browsing and fire where trespass by domestic livestock is common, impaired drainage and inadequate nutrition.

Transfer of risk to the private sector offers the prospect of linking profitability in wood processing with the responsibility for sustainable forest management over the long term. A clear specification is needed of the transferred risks.

Alternatively, cutting back on timber production and associated management and replacement costs can reduce public expenditure. This is likely to result in reduced working at the mills. If production capacity is lost subsequently then it will be hard to replace.

**Q2 Should we encourage further industrial investment in wood processing? If so, do any of the options for containing public expenditure have particular attractions for overall development of the forestry sector?**

### **4.3 Delivery of Industry Development**

The future role of the Forest Service is critical, because it manages most of the timber resource in NI. The Service has a multiplicity of services to provide, with a strong focus on environmental and social goods as well as economic benefits. The demand for all these is growing. The Forest Service has certified management practices which are able to meet this growing demand without reducing the commercial area and harvest potential of the forest resource in the medium term. This has required additional cost to achieve the existing socio-economic balance. This adversely affects the competitiveness of forestry in Northern Ireland compared to other lower cost regions of the world.

A global assessment shows that across many forest products the wood cost component is often the most dominant (as percentage of total cost). Wood cost is the component of total cost that varies most between competitors, and is the essential strategic differential. In other words, achieving

competitiveness is largely a function of wood cost. This is particularly so for solid wood products (such as sawn-wood in general) and pulp. Transport costs are an important differential for panel products, which are expensive to transport because of relatively low weight and value to volume.

As the largest forest owner and an important member of the sector supply chain, the Forest Service could act as a facilitator and motivator, to promote a strong investment platform plus a climate of demand-pull, rather than supply-push. Alternatively, a more laissez faire approach can be taken by growers and industry to secure the best return on growing timber.

### Clusters

Industrial clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialised suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (for example universities, standards agencies and trade associations) in particular fields that compete but also co-operate. (Porter, 1998)<sup>5</sup>

Northern Ireland has a regionally significant cluster based on wood and paper products. The cluster industries include forestry and logging, saw milling, paper products, cartons and boxes through to kitchen furniture. The latter is the most significant industry with 6% of United Kingdom employment. Altogether, the cluster industries employ 11,000 people (dti, 2001)<sup>6</sup>. The cluster is mature, meaning that the cluster is probably as “full” as it is likely to get. Entry of new companies will be difficult or unattractive. The analysis does not take account of complementary activity in the RoI.

The forestry sector is a small part of the entire cluster, but has an obvious interest in the successful development of the cluster.

Competitor countries are investing heavily in measures designed to strengthen their forest and wood industry clusters. Typical actions are establishing and promoting the research and education base needed to make use of wood and wood products in engineering, building and furniture manufacture. Other actions facilitate networking within the cluster to promote innovation, raise standards, and establish markets. Particular problems in Northern Ireland are the durability and stability of homegrown timber, and the difficulty of gaining acceptance in domestic markets.

If Northern Ireland is to develop its forest products sector successfully then action is required on six specific areas to:

- Improve supply chain competitiveness;
- Strengthen the industry cluster in the Irish forestry sector;
- Promote secondary processing;
- Create end-user preference for ‘home-grown’ wood products;
- Promote stakeholder harmony; and
- Focus on cost efficiency of growing timber.

The potential development options for Northern Ireland all carry strong preconditions in terms of achieving competitiveness through the supply chain.

### **Q3 How can we best assist in securing further industry development? Is there a preferred model for development of the forest industry?**

<sup>5</sup> Porter, M (1998) Clusters and the New Economics of Competition, Harvard Business Review, Nov/Dec.

<sup>6</sup> dti (2001) Business Clusters in the UK – a first assessment. A report for the Department of Trade and Industry by a consortium led by Trends Business Research.

## 5 DEVELOPING FOREST POLICY

### 5.1 United Kingdom and European Union Policies.

Current forest policy in Northern Ireland is:

- The sustainable management of our existing woods and forests; and
- A steady expansion of tree cover to increase the many diverse benefits that forests provide.

*The direction of a new forest policy for Northern Ireland should be guided by the international and European agreements and commitments entered into by the United Kingdom Government.* The United Kingdom is a signatory to the “Statement of Forest Principles” agreed at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The forest principles were summarised as “Forest resources and forest lands should be sustainably managed to meet the social, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual human needs of present and future generations”. After this European forestry ministers passed a series of resolutions (Helsinki 1993, Lisbon 1998, et seq.) affirming their commitment to apply the Forest Principles and other international commitments.

The European Union does not have a common forest policy. Nevertheless, there is a body of legislation and financial support chiefly in the areas of agriculture, rural development and the environment, which support the European forestry resolutions. The Northern Ireland administration has a duty to maintain its legislative programme to comply with the EU requirements affecting forestry.

Although Northern Ireland forest policy must be consistent with the United Kingdom’s international agreements and European legislation, the policy itself is a devolved responsibility. The administration therefore has an opportunity to examine and modify the current policy to meet the needs of Northern Ireland.

### 5.2 Scope for Developing a Forest Policy.

The wood products industry is an existing, mature cluster of businesses that has regional significance. The forests also have regional significance for access to the countryside, and they have a significant impact on the environment. The forests have a noticeable impact on our economy and lives and draw upon significant public expenditure annually. Consequently, there is a need for a clear policy on forestry in Northern Ireland to guide the direction in which forests should be developed. The effectiveness of Northern Ireland forest policy should be measured by its impact on regional development (including the social use of forests) and the environment. In this context the recently published Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland provides an important framework for the development of forest policy. The Strategy provides a regional planning framework for tackling deficiencies in the Northern Ireland infrastructure and helping the overall development of the economy. The promotion of sustainable development, which is also a key aspect of forest policy and social inclusion, underpin the strategy. The RDS encompasses a number of policy statements specifically related to forestry. These policies, which are referred to in Box 5 below, are compatible with proposed forest policy development.

**Box 5.****REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY POLICIES SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO FORESTRY**

- Sustain and extend the forestry resources of Northern Ireland.
- Further develop the potential for countryside recreation in an environmentally sensitive way.
- Expand rural tourism in a sustainable manner.
- Manage the use of rural resources to achieve a more sustainable pattern of development.
- To conserve the natural environment.
- Protect and manage areas designated for their scientific interest.
- Protect, manage and enhance the resources of woodland and hedgerows as features of environmental and historic significance.
- Protect, enhance and encourage appreciation of the Region's landscapes.

The recently published industry 'Vision for the Future of the Agri-Food Industry' also identified areas for developing forest policy under the themes of "Strengthening the Rural Economy" and "Safeguarding Our Land-Based Heritage and Rural Environment". The needs expressed were for:

- additional employment opportunities in other sectors such as tourism and forestry that are accessible to rural communities, and for:
- an expansion of afforestation and an increase in the growing of crops as alternative energy sources.

Box 6 below incorporates the detailed recommendations relevant to forest policy contained in the Vision report.

**Box 6.****VISION RECOMMENDATIONS RELEVANT TO FORESTS**

- DARD should seek to increase the area of farm woodland plantings by extending the period during which annual payments are made
- There should be no difference in the payments for on-farm tree plantings for LFA and non-LFA land
- By 2005 DARD should seek to raise awareness and training in woodland management
- In its current review of forest policy DARD should consider how to encourage the development of new market opportunities and industries to enhance the return from timber and its by-products
- The review should also consider the further development of appropriate funding mechanisms to promote broadleaved afforestation for environmental gain and public amenity.
- Means of encouraging the development of agro-forestry in appropriate areas
- Opportunities for the growing of crops to provide alternative energy sources
- DARD should develop in association with DETI and the DOE a strategic approach to the development of sustainable energy systems at rural community level
- Efforts should be made to maximise the use within Northern Ireland of monies raised from "Green" taxes such as the Climate Change Levy.

Most of the forest in Northern Ireland is man made. *Forest policy should seek to realise the maximum benefit to our society from past investment and make proper provision to hand on an adequate area of forest to meet the needs of future generations.* The forests offer opportunities for industrial

development, social development for exercise and enjoyment of the countryside, and enhancement of our environment. We have decisions to make about the extent and type of forest to replace that exploited for industrial development, and those decisions will affect the opportunities open to future generations. We also have opportunities to expand the area under forest by planting new forests, and this brings with it decisions about the scale and type of forest, as well as location. In a few cases, we may wish to replace forests with other forms of land use, where this would be of greater benefit to our society. Consequently, *forest policy should focus on how forests can improve the life and well being of the people of Northern Ireland* by making explicit links with the priorities in the Executive's Programme for Government, including those centring on equality of opportunity, New Targeting Social Need and Promoting Social Inclusion.

Aspects of forest policy are likely to be cross cutting between the responsibilities of the majority of Departments and their agencies. *There is therefore a need to agree the scope of forest policy between departments and define responsibilities for delivery of the agreed policy.*

### Box 7

#### CROSS CUTTING ISSUES INVOLVING FORESTRY

- Department of the Environment (DOE) has responsibilities to protect trees from development pressures, conservation of biodiversity, natural and built heritage and access to the countryside.
- Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has responsibilities for sporting activities in Northern Ireland.
- Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has responsibilities for promoting public health by encouraging healthy exercise. Forests are an important venue.
- Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has an interest in industrial use of forest products; in the renewable energy potential of such products; and in the use of forests in the context of tourist activity.
- Department for Regional Development (DRD) has responsibility for the infrastructure of Northern Ireland which is needed to realise the potential wealth contained in the forests and has interests in the impact of forests on water supply.
- Department of Education (DE) has responsibilities for education and youth services, and both sectors use forests.
- Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) has responsibilities for skills training which can benefit forestry development.
- Department for Social Development (DSD) has responsibilities for promoting access to open space and wooded areas for recreational and educational purposes within urban areas.
- Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has responsibilities for trees in the farming environment in addition to forestry, and rural development interests.

The Forestry Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 does not itself define forestry, and administrative definitions were developed. These generally depended upon the use of land for growing trees and contained a measure of scale. For example, grant aid was only available for planting proposals on areas of more than 0.2 ha. In other circumstances forestry training was available for all those who needed skills in tree work, including those cases where the skill was likely to be applied generally to the management of single trees as in the case of tree surgery. Thus the scope can be defined in terms of the land use, or alternatively in terms of the knowledge and skills of those working in the industry.

The definition of forests used by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation is in terms of land use. Use of this definition allows comparison with other forestry regions. The definition covers “forest”, “other wooded land”, and “trees outside the forest”. In a “forest” the tree crowns cover more

than 20% of the area, the trees grow to more than 7m in height and are able to produce wood, and the area occupied by the trees is larger than 0.5ha

“Other wooded land” has some forestry characteristics, but does not fall within the description above. It includes open woodland and scrub, whether or not used for pasture or range.

“Trees outside the forest” includes trees in hedgerows and on boundaries, tree orchards for fruit and nut production, shelter trees, trees in city parks, streets, gardens, and small woodlots less than 0.5ha in extent. This category includes most urban forestry, and produces useful quantities of forest products in hardwood timber as well as landscape and other environmental benefits.

There are merits in a forest policy that covers all aspects of growing and protecting trees in Northern Ireland. This definition would capture all the land use interests in trees as well as most of the knowledge and skills based definitions. However, the policy interests in trees widen considerably as the threshold decreases, and the emphasis of policy is likely to result in a bias towards small woods and single trees. Consequently, *there is perhaps greater merit in restricting the scope of forest policy to land used for “forestry” and “other wooded land”*. This excludes “Trees outside the forest”.

#### **Q4 To what extent will restricting the scope of forest policy to cover only land used for forests and other wooded land result in a gap in broader public policy which is not already covered by other initiatives?**

### **5.3 Securing a Competitive Economy.**

Compared with other industrial sectors, forestry contributes a small amount to the overall performance of the Northern Ireland economy. On the other hand it is an important contributor to the development of rural areas and offers increasing opportunities for diversification of employment for declining farming communities. The structure and management of most forests aim to contribute to economic development. *The delivery of regional development opportunity through wood production should continue to be the main policy aim for most forests.*

There are strategic issues surrounding the capacity of the rural road network to absorb timber traffic and the accessibility of forests for exercise and recreation. There are also issues about whether forests should make a greater contribution towards tourism and about the scale of environmental improvements required. However, the scale of future demands is unlikely to require a significant shift in the present underlying balance between management of forests to produce wood and management to deliver other environmental and social needs.

#### **Q5 Should the main policy aim for forestry be delivery of regional development opportunity?**

##### **5.3.1 Development of Existing Woodlands**

Managing existing woodlands to produce timber has potential to provide development opportunities for a wood based economy particularly centred on Counties Fermanagh and Londonderry, and foster cross border economic development.

The industry faces challenges to ensure that it becomes internationally competitive. Several important linkages are required to ensure that we can take full advantage of the stimulus of competition and co-operation and continue the development of a successful industrial cluster in the region.

There are opportunities to make Northern Ireland more attractive for inward investment particularly by those industries suited to processing low value logs and sawmill residues. There are issues affecting location within the constraints of rules on fair competition, the availability of labour and skills and the environmental footprint of a major new wood processing plant. This includes the requirements for water and energy.

Infrastructure is important for the forest industry cluster because road, sea transport and energy costs are all significant parts of the total cost of supplying wood products to consumers. Good infrastructure also gives an advantage in meeting customers demands promptly, and can give a significant marketing advantage particularly over suppliers located outside the British Isles. The roads issue in particular is important at present. Many minor public roads connect forests to the strategic trunk road network, but they suffer accelerated deterioration from the intensive, short duration loads imposed by modern forestry.

## **Q6 Are these the issues? How can these issues be resolved to attract inward investment?**

### **5.3.2 Increasing the Attractiveness of Northern Ireland for Visitors**



Forests serve to enhance the range of opportunities for leisure in the countryside and offer increased opportunities for the development of tourism in Northern Ireland, especially in rural areas. Forests contribute to the landscape and attractiveness of Northern Ireland and are therefore of general importance in providing the setting to several important visitor destinations and tourist routes. They are also of specific importance because they attract paying visitors into the forests themselves. About 170,000 people pay to use Northern Ireland's forests, of which up to one third are from outside Northern Ireland. Those Northern Ireland residents who pay to visit forests do so regularly.

The attractiveness of Northern Ireland forests for out of state visitors depends on being able to integrate forest visits into the overall package that brings visitors to Northern Ireland in the first place. It also depends on providing a consistently high quality experience, and providing helpful information before and during the visit.

*Forests should be used to improve the attractiveness of landscapes and absorb visitors.* This will require strategic investment to maintain and improve the attractiveness of existing forests and in new planting which improves landscape and creates opportunities for tourism in areas where there is a deficiency.

Among the most popular tourist areas are the Mourne, the Glens of Antrim, and Fermanagh. Groups of plantations in these areas offer opportunities for consolidation by further planting and securing access agreements over privately owned land so that activities can be developed which take advantage of the larger scale of these forests. Gosford Forest Park may provide an opportunity for more intensive tourism development. Forest owners will need to secure active partnerships with the tourist industry to successfully market forest visits within a broader package.

## **Q7 What type of visitor experience should forests provide?**

## **Q8 Where should future forest based visitor development take place?**

### 5.3.3 Forest Replacement and Expansion for Development

Northern Ireland forests have potential to mature and become ready for harvest up to a rate of 1,500 ha per year by 2015.

There is environmental and social pressure for less intensive methods of production, more woodland, more open space within woodlands, greater variety of tree species and greater age diversity. If met, these pressures will lead to a long-term reduction in the area of productive forest. To secure any long-term industrial investment and development in wood processing there is a need to maintain productive capacity at least at the level expected by 2015. To retain this capacity and meet the pressures for greater diversity of forests, the remaining area of forest needs to improve productivity by at least 10%. Productivity gains of this magnitude are unlikely in view of the pressures to manage forests less intensively. Alternatively, the same effect can be achieved by additional planting of the main timber producing species at an indicative rate of 200 ha per year. Because of the strategic need to protect long term employment opportunities in rural areas *there should be a presumption in favour of replacing productive capacity as it is harvested, so that existing woodland areas will be retained as woodland except where overriding public benefits would result from permanent deforestation.*

#### Q9 What is your view on how this policy balances the needs of the environment and economy?

There are obvious difficulties in forecasting what the demand for forest products will be in 40 years time. Historically demand was closely related to both population growth and industrial growth. Currently, each year we consume forest products equivalent to the production from an area one third the size of Northern Ireland. A goal of self-sufficiency in forest products would therefore require a very significant change in land use. It would also require a culture shift in favour of using home-grown softwood and hardwood. Northern Ireland is a small, relatively densely populated region, and land is highly valued for agriculture. Consequently, we are unlikely ever to be self sufficient in forest products. Instead, *we should continue to obtain most of our requirements for forest products by trade with other regions.*

However, our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland both have forest expansion strategies aimed at creating new opportunities for industrial development. There is an argument that our approach to forestry should be compatible with that of our neighbours so that we may share in any future benefits gained from creating a significant natural resource in this part of Europe. There may be justification for a proportionate effort in Northern Ireland that would support a future bid to secure investment in wood processing capacity in competition with those countries. The rate of expansion is a critical issue that depends on affordability and the rate at which agricultural change can take place.

*Where forest expansion takes place it should be strategically co-ordinated with other land uses.* Future coniferous planting should encourage consolidation of forests to concentrate productive capacity in a few localities and build a sound economic basis for further forestry development. Some forest expansion for industrial purposes could also support policies that seek to improve the attractiveness of Northern Ireland for visitors by consolidating forests and providing public access. Major improvements for visitors may require specific action to achieve new planting and access.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in collaboration with the Department of Trade and Industry and NIE has commenced a study on renewable energy sourced electricity and its impact on grid capacity and management. The outcome of the study is likely to be relevant to the progressive development for its policy. Northern Ireland is obliged to contribute to UK commitments to the EU for renewable energy sourced electricity and there are limited economically viable renewable options

available at present. Although forestry based resources are likely to be comparatively expensive options there is a possibility that energy markets might be developed from forestry residues and low value plantations which would otherwise find difficulty in generating revenues, and for plantations grown specifically for energy generation. However, indicative figures suggest that about 10,000 ha fuel wood plantations (mainly of short rotation coppice) would be required to make a notable contribution to electricity generation.

Land use change towards forestry is likely to generate concerns about the extent to which land should be reserved for other purposes such as agriculture, nature conservation or water collection. Mechanisms for reconciling these concerns can be developed, such as preparation of an indicative land use plan, to identify those areas where land should be restricted to very few uses, and those areas where there is greater flexibility for change. The potential for forest expansion on to land classed as “hill and rough grazing” is likely to be severely limited. This is because of the extent of habitats described as important for conservation in the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group recommendations (see paragraph 3.4).

**Q10 To what extent should forest cover increase and at what rate?**

**Q11 What types and locations of forests are required?**

**Q12 How can the need for additional forest best be reconciled with the need to conserve diversity of habitat and species and other land use demands?**

## **5.4 Ensuring the Protection and Enhancement of the Environment**

Forests play a significant role in moderating the net flux of greenhouse gases between the land and the atmosphere. Increasing forest cover with the sole aim of carbon sequestration is, generally not seen as a viable mitigating measure. However, forest expansion for whatever reason will also bring small carbon sequestration benefits, and as such is recognised as a measure in the UK’s Climate Change Programme.

More widely, forests are an important part of our environment and because they are extensive, they interact with other parts of the environment in significant ways. Many of the interactions are highly desirable but occasionally issues arise about loss of water yield and quality, loss of habitat for biological diversity, landscape change, and movement of forest animals on to agricultural land. These issues have arisen in the past in water collection areas and the headwaters of important fishing rivers, on peat land and other areas of low intensity farming. They also occur in areas of moderate or strong landscape relief, and adjacent to intensive agriculture where forests support large wildlife populations. Some forests fulfill important functions around urban areas and industrial sites by filtering noise and trapping airborne particles, and by screening. Consequently, the conversion of land to or from forest use from or to any other use may require preparation of an Environmental Statement where the impact of the change in land use is likely to be significant in environmental terms.

*Environmental protection, including environmental improvement and conservation of biodiversity should continue to permeate through forest policy.* Forests make an important contribution to environmental protection and sustainable development. We should ensure that they continue to do so by action in the areas of water, habitat, landscape and heritage ancillary to forests, and encouraging the use of forest products as part of developing a sustainable economy for Northern Ireland.

### 5.4.1 Forests and Water

Northern Ireland relies on water collection from areas of high ground for much of its water supply, and forests in the headwaters of important fishing rivers are the subject of concern in relation to impact on water, particularly on the grounds of diminished water yield and water acidification. There is evidence that upland lakes were enriched as a consequence of afforesting peatland in particular. Experience has shown that these forests need the addition of fertiliser and use of herbicides and pesticides at critical stages of their development to produce timber. Great care is needed to ensure that



watercourses are not contaminated by forest operations. There is no evidence that water yield and water quality are adversely affected by existing or continuing planting to the extent that water abstraction and fishing will be significantly damaged, so long as forests are managed in line with published guidelines on safeguarding water quality.

Current planting is on significantly richer ground, where the presence of tree cover is likely to reduce the nutrient load in water catchments by removing land from agricultural use.

***Forests are scarce in Northern Ireland, and should continue to be managed for timber production and receive the minimum intervention consistent with the need to grow and produce timber.*** The industry is expected to exercise a considerable degree of care in its planning and operations to safeguard the water environment and work within the context of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

There are options for restoring the most sensitive upland lake habitats, for example by redesigning drainage schemes and removing enriched vegetation. Surveys are needed to establish the potential. Revised guidelines on the treatment of United Kingdom forests in relation to protecting water bodies are in preparation, and there is a need to ensure that good practice is widely understood and disseminated throughout the forest industry.

**Q13 Are there areas of existing forest where management to produce timber is incompatible with the need to collect water and maintain good river quality?**

### 5.4.2 Forests and Nature Conservation

Conservation of biodiversity represents an essential objective of sustainable forest management. Native woodlands generate significant public interest as part of our natural heritage, and enjoy considerable support at all levels of our community. ***Forest policy should encourage protection and restoration of ancient woodland sites, improvement of the biodiversity value of conifer woodland, and improved management of broadleaved woodlands. Forest expansion should aim to increase the***

*area of broadleaved woodlands. It should also make specific provision for consolidating the most important woodland habitats* (which are upland oak woodlands, upland ash woodlands, and wet woodlands), *and link woodland and other habitats together.* Coniferous forests have proved that they can accommodate those elements of our native flora and fauna that are adaptable to shady woodland conditions and the mosaic of forest clearings and open space that occurs in managed forests. In the case of the red squirrel, the presence of extensive areas of coniferous forest is critical to its survival in Northern Ireland. Some species have flourished. Some of these species are of significance to forest neighbours because of their impact on grazing, their capability of transmitting diseases of livestock, and the belief that they prey on livestock. While deer species currently have little impact outside forests, control is necessary inside forests, and there is potential to reach large numbers and do economic damage to both forestry and farming. Deer are an important component of forest ecology, but there should be effective monitoring and control of populations.

Climate change may shift the natural range of our native plant and animal species, and affect the ability of introduced forest species to adapt to our environment. Some habitats may themselves be changed. Therefore, there is a need to understand these changes and learn how to accommodate change in a way which retains diversity and productive capability.

Some species of plants and animals not native to Ireland can, when introduced and established in woodlands, cause economic and environmental problems (for example grey squirrels, some deer species and rhododendron). As this is an area with high risk *there is a need for a review of the effectiveness of the controls on the introduction and spread of exotic forest species.*

#### **Q14 Where would additional forest protection and habitat improvement activity be of most value?**

### **5.4.3 Forests and Landscape**

Forests are important parts of the landscape, and are evident by virtue of their scale, the shape of plantations and areas of tree felling, the texture and colour of the trees. In many cases, the forests make a strong contribution to the interest and character of the landscape. Often the forests are significant components in their own right. In other places, they provide valuable screening for other less attractive forms of land use. The forest industry has done much to improve its design standards and practice, and in time will show further improvements. There is a need to promote new local scale planting to soften the dramatic edges in some landscapes and to screen less attractive land uses. There are also opportunities for areas of new forest to enhance the landscape and attractiveness for visitors.

*New planting and replacement of existing forests should add to the quality of the landscape in the most sensitive landscapes, and take account of the impact on the landscape elsewhere by adhering to high standards of design.* This should be a major feature of forest planning in public forests, and encouragement and regulation of private forests.

#### **Q15 Are there particular concerns about the impact of forests on the landscape which need to be addressed?**

#### 5.4.4 Built Heritage and Land Ancillary to Forests

The most important examples of archaeology, the built environment and ecologically important habitats fall within the ambit of policies on planning and protection of the environment. Where archaeological sites are not protected by statute, they are protected in accordance with government policy.



Other examples of our natural and built heritage are not protected by statute and are closely associated with forests. Some of these are remnants of large estates, and the walls and buildings are now important features in the landscape or have architectural significance. Others represent

valuable landscape features or semi-natural habitats and some of these are very extensive. There has been a link between forest expansion and conservation of valuable open habitat. This occurred where planting occurred on part of a land holding but a proportion was unsuitable on silvicultural grounds. The benefits occurred because of the changes in grazing management associated with forestry.

Although there are alternative supports available to farmers to encourage low intensity farming and environmental improvement, there remain conservation advantages from the type of extensive management associated with forests. Consequently *forest policy should continue to support the management of ancillary open land and the built heritage for objectives related to conservation and enjoyment of the countryside.*

**Q16 Is the link between management of forests and conservation of ancillary heritage assets sufficiently strong? In what way should it be altered?**

**Q17 What other environmental issues should be considered?**

### 5.5 Working for a Healthier People

The population of Northern Ireland is becoming more sedentary and is ageing. There are public health concerns that lack of even moderate exercise is predisposing our people to disease and slowing recovery from illness. Simple activities such as walking will have an effect on this, and should be encouraged at all ages. Many people use woodlands for exercise, and these opportunities are particularly valuable where they are close to centres of population because they provide the enticement of a peaceful and pleasant environment.

Different people have different problems in gaining access to forests. For some, it is the physical challenge of travelling on rough paths. For others, there may be no forest near by or it may be the cost of entry to the most popular forest parks.

*The policy objective should be to encourage access to forests so that our people can take exercise to improve the standard of health in the population and to enjoy the benefits of a woodland environment. We should also seek to make forests available to specialist users for sporting and other purposes where there is clear public value in doing so.*

- Q18 What are the barriers to improving accessibility to forests; and how can these be overcome?**
- Q19 Which uses of forests create difficulty for other users and how can these be reconciled?**

### **5.5.1 Access to Existing Woodland**



Current practice is to charge for admission to the most popular forest parks, but access is free to many forests of local interest. Charged forests are important for day visits and camping, and are important in representing the attractiveness of Northern Ireland to visitors. While revenue from admission charges partially offsets costs, the use of forests for public access is heavily subsidised by the public purse.

There are concerns that where charges are made this may be a deterrent to access by some under-represented groups of people.

Preliminary research evidence suggests that removing charges would attract at least an additional 10% of visits each year. At this stage, there is insufficient evidence to determine the full extent to which charging for access is a barrier to access. Until additional research is carried out, charges should be made for access where this is practicable at a level consistent with encouraging broad use of forests. There are also issues around whether the public should enjoy the access benefits of forests as of right, and whether this would increase the sense of public ownership and participation in the life and management of our forests.

Because forests are important in providing informal access to the countryside, *the policy should seek to reduce or remove the barriers to all sections of the community in accessing woodlands.*

- Q20 What qualitative changes would people find helpful and would increase their enjoyment of forests?**
- Q21 Is there evidence that the broad level of charges to forests are a disadvantage to particular groups of society in obtaining access to forests?**
- Q22 Should charging be extended to more sites to reduce the public burden of maintaining access opportunity?**
- Q23 Would woodlands be used more effectively if access was a public right rather than by invitation of the forest owner as happens in some other European countries? What would the impact of such a right be on delivery of the policy of managing forests in a sustainable manner?**

## 5.5.2 Forest Expansion for Urban Development and Access

New woodlands close to urban areas provide increased access opportunities for people, offer opportunities to screen development, define settlements and integrate urban land use with rural land use. Existing grant schemes aim to improve public access to the countryside by providing approximately 2 ha of accessible forest per 1000 people in urban areas, in association with other areas of publicly accessible open space. This indicates an apparent deficit in urban forest provision of about 2000 ha throughout Northern Ireland.

*Forest expansion is required to provide an adequate area of woodland offering public access, close to towns and cities.*

### Q24 Are there areas where new forests and woodlands would make a specific contribution to the life and well-being of urban settlements?

## 5.6 Investing in Education and Skills

Forests offer an important natural resource ideally suited for education, particularly of children, on environmental issues and sustainable development. The participants in the forest industry also have a need for education and training to enable them to deliver the goods and services we require from forests.

### 5.6.1 Use of Forests for Public Education

The main users at present for guided school visits are 6000 primary school children at Key Stage Levels 1 and 2 each year. Older children and young adults (Levels 3, 4 and tertiary education) have a reduced demand for specialist forest guides, but do use the forest resource for specific curriculum based activities and life-long learning. Even greater numbers (of the order of 100,000 visits each year) use public forests for social development delivered as group activities, led mainly by the youth services, uniformed youth organisations, and schools. Adults are interested in the knowledge gained about sustainable development from forest visits. While the focus has been on school children forests also offer opportunities to educate adults and for life long learning on sustainable development.

*The policy objective should be to continue to promote the use of forests in the social development and education of our children.* “Developing in a sustainable way” is an important theme running through the Northern Ireland Programme for Government, which influences the objectives and values that will direct the revised Northern Ireland curriculum. Consequently there is potential for schools to develop a special interest in forests as a very visible example of complex integration of economic, environmental and social values to deliver sustainable development locally, while reflecting the global pressures that affect us all.

Forests are well used, and they provide a reasonably safe environment for these activities. *The use of forests for education should be encouraged where it is practicable.* There are many participating agencies, some of which are competing for educational business. Education should be delivered effectively and use resources efficiently, and the nature of the educational experience needs greater strategic direction. This is a task primarily for the education authorities in partnership with forestry and other providers. There is a need for closer inter-departmental working to secure appropriate and cost effective development of forest based opportunities for education and social development. The costs of accessing forests can be a significant factor in the programming of educational and youth activities, and in some cases this may lead to needy young people missing out on opportunities to make use of public assets.

**Q25 What needs to be done to promote wider use of forests for educational purposes?**

**Q26 Where should the burden fall of interpreting the forest environment to young people?**

### **5.6.2 Education and Research for the Forestry Sector**

Although there are approximately 5000 forest owners in Northern Ireland, less than 500 people in Northern Ireland need specialist forestry skills and knowledge to service the forest industry. Additional people use forestry skills and knowledge in the agriculture, amenity horticulture and utilities industries. The range of skills and knowledge required is very broad, encompassing several specialist areas including arboriculture, and covering industrial craft skills through to qualification as a member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters. Much of the employment is based in the Forest Service, an Agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, but arboriculture companies also employ significant numbers, as do timber harvesting contractors, charitable trusts and local authorities. The Forest Service maintains a training capacity mainly for its own staff, and makes limited provision for external demand at cost.

Higher level qualifications in forestry (national diplomas and degree courses) are expensive to provide, and require greater numbers of students than are available in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland students should continue to seek admission to universities and colleges in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. There are greater demands for skills and craft courses, and *there should be access to skills and craft courses in forestry in Northern Ireland which lead to widely recognised qualifications*. There should also be provision to meet the need for improved understanding of forestry by land owners. The arboriculture sector also needs to maintain and improve its skills and it needs access to training in Northern Ireland. The skills required fall within a broader definition of forestry that includes working with trees outside the forest, and there is no other policy provision for this increasingly important sector of the economy.

**Q27 How should the training needs for the forestry and arboricultural sectors be delivered in future?**

There is a need to monitor and disseminate advances in forestry knowledge and to monitor the development and impact of our forests. There is also a requirement to support the research to ensure that the building industry can accept homegrown wood.

There is a substantial research interest in forests in Northern Ireland from several disciplines within the two universities and DARD. This research contributes to growing timber, understanding ecology, social interaction with forests, utilising wood and integrating forests with agriculture. In some cases the research has achieved wide recognition outside Northern Ireland for advancing knowledge.

*There should be provision for adequate research to support the contribution forestry can make to the economy, social development and the environment.*

**Q28 What are the needs for forest and forest products research in Northern Ireland in relation to the contribution that forestry can make to the economy, to social development, and the environment?**

**Q29 Are there preferences for ensuring access to the results of forest and forest products research?**

## 6 OPTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY

The major issues in implementing a revised forest policy are determining the respective roles of the public and private and voluntary sectors, and finance.

The delivery mechanisms are likely to be a mixture of direct public sector involvement and participation, support to private and voluntary sectors, and legislation.

The essential driver for industrial development in Ireland is assurance of raw material supplies for a significant part of production needs. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development or Coillte Teoranta together own most of this timber resource, and significant quantities are maturing in the private sector in the Republic of Ireland. The state bodies can devise mechanisms for guaranteeing supply relatively simply. The choices are long term contracts for the supply of timber, sale of the rights to harvest timber on specified plantations for very many years, and outright sale of plantations. The choices have consequences for the delivery of non-timber benefits. Sustained delivery from the private sector is more difficult to organise as private owners may have different objectives.

Delivery of wider public benefits from forestry has been difficult to obtain unless it is provided directly by the public sector, or is supplied as a consequence of providing public support to the private sector through grant-aid. Apart from the Forest Service and the Environment and Heritage Service, the main providers have been charitable trusts, formed specifically to deliver those benefits that the charities favour, or district councils. Private owners often benefit directly from environmental schemes, and are therefore more likely to participate in schemes aimed at delivering these benefits. Some benefits, such as public access, effectively prevent owners from enjoying an exclusive right to their property. Consequently securing public access in particular is likely to require continued public sector involvement in owning and managing property, although there are choices available about which type of public body should have delivery responsibility.

Forests can only expand significantly by planting land that is currently in private ownership. The current pattern of state involvement is a result of past unwillingness by the private sector to get involved in forestry in a significant way. Although there is now a healthy interest in private planting supported by grant aid, the pattern of activity is very scattered.

The private sector usually involves people who derive their main income from sources other than farming or forestry. This pattern is common throughout Europe. It follows from a period of relative decline in the farming economy during which landowners planted their farms. While this is a useful way of bringing private capital into the industry, the participants rarely view forestry as an investment designed to bring a financial reward. Countries with a longer forestry tradition than exists in Northern Ireland have found that timber production has a low priority, and experience real difficulties in delivering timber to industry. In those countries where timber is an important feature of the national economy, this has led to increased regulation of forests to compel good forestry practice to deliver public benefits. In other countries, owners simply neglect their woodlands. This is one of the drivers for the current international interest in defining and obtaining sustainable forest management.

The current situation in Northern Ireland is that farming is facing a period of decline and many landowners are planting agricultural land. If grant aid is withdrawn, planting may continue but at lower levels of activity. There will probably be an increase in scrub growth in the poorer areas, which will have little timber value because of the absence of tall trees and inherently poor wood quality.

Grant aid may continue to be a vehicle for effecting change in land use. The current approach in providing grant aid is to reimburse costs and compensate for agricultural income forgone. However to obtain some of the more important forestry benefits, such as forest consolidation and public access, there may need to be an element of public purchase. Because the current approach links incentives for planting to loss of farm income over very long periods, this can create large public expenditure pressures in future.

The alternative approach is to continue with direct public sector participation in land purchase, planting and management, particularly where there are strategic reasons for involvement. This approach can also store up large public expenditure pressures, but there are opportunities to transfer established forests to the private sector, to recover some expenses, and avoid others.

*The preferred policy approach is that the private sector should play a fuller role in delivering forest policy in Northern Ireland.* The public sector should play a strategic role in acquiring land and establishing new forests to improve competitiveness and deliver public benefits. However, the private sector should become progressively more responsible for delivering economic benefits of forests.

- Q30 Which forms of forest ownership are most likely to secure a competitive forest based economy?**
- Q31 Are land owners likely to have a significant interest in providing public access to privately owned forests?**
- Q32 Should District Councils have a greater responsibility for delivering public benefits from forests?**
- Q33 How should future grant aid be targeted to secure the greatest public benefit from forests at least cost?**
- Q34 Which areas of forestry are likely to require increased regulation to secure the most important policy objectives and public benefits?**

## 7. CONCLUSION

The main recommendations are that the existing policy of managing forests in a sustainable manner should continue. The recommendations give substance to this by suggesting that the main thrust should be on developing the economic value of the timber resource, and promoting tourism. Development should be subject to constraints of conserving and protecting the environment. The recommendations suggest that access to forests for all should be encouraged, so that people can take more exercise and to encourage young people's education and social development. There is also a continuing need for access to forestry education and training to meet the needs of the industry.

There is a need for further strategic planting to consolidate, maintain and enhance timber production. This will improve long-term efficiency, secure improvements to the environment and the landscape, and secure additional opportunities for improving the attractiveness of Northern Ireland for visitors. The rate, scale and type of planting are important issues in terms of land use change and cost. Northern Ireland can maintain forest cover at approximately its current level or it can state an aspiration to move towards a greater amount of forest cover.

The preferred approach for delivery of policy aims is that the private sector should play a fuller role. The public sector should continue to play a strategic role in acquiring land and establishing new forests to improve competitiveness and deliver public benefits but the private sector should take greater responsibility for delivering economic benefits of forests. There are several ways in which this can be achieved, including direct public sector intervention by the devolved administration and the district councils and by encouragement and regulation of the private sector. Each has a different implication for public expenditure and regulation of private freedoms.



# FORESTRY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

## A P P E N D I X A

### SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND QUESTIONS.

#### **Developing Forest Policy**

*Policy development should be guided by the international and European agreements and commitments entered into by the United Kingdom Government (Paragraph 5.1 ).*

*There is merit in restricting the scope of forest policy to land used for “forestry” and “other wooded land” only ( Paragraph 5.2).*

*There is a need to agree the scope of forest policy between departments and define responsibilities for delivery of the agreed policy (Paragraph 5.2)*

#### **Key Issues Facing Forestry**

*Forest policy should seek to realise the maximum benefit to our society from past investment and make proper provision to hand on an adequate area of forest to meet the needs of future generations. It should also focus on how forests can improve the life and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland ( Paragraph 5.2).*

#### **Sustainability**

*Sustainability in management and development should be the one strategic goal that underpins development of forest policy (Paragraph 3.1).*

## **Economic Development**

*The delivery of regional development opportunity through wood production should continue to be the main aim for most forests (Paragraph 5.3).*

## **Forest Replacement and Expansion for Development**

*There should be a presumption in favour of replacing productive capacity as it is harvested, so that existing woodland areas will be retained as woodland except where overriding public benefits would result from permanent deforestation (Paragraph 5.3.3).*

*We should continue to obtain most of our requirements for forest products by trade with other regions (Paragraph 5.3.3).*

*Where forest expansion takes place it should be strategically co-ordinated with other land uses (Paragraph 5.3.3).*

## **Recreation and Tourism**

*Forests should be used to improve the attractiveness of landscapes and absorb visitors (Paragraph 5.3.2).*

## **Access to Existing Woodland**

*We should seek to reduce or remove the barriers to all sections of the community in accessing woodlands (Paragraph 5.5.1).*

## **Issues for the Future Development of Forests**

Q1 Are the main issues correctly identified, or are there other questions which we should address?  
Paras. 3.2-3.6

## **Developing the Forest Products Industry**

Q2 Should we encourage further industrial investment in wood processing? If so, do any of the options for containing public expenditure have particular attractions for overall development of the forestry sector? Para.4.2

## **Delivery of Industry Development**

Q3 How can we best assist in securing further industry development? Is there a preferred model for development of the forest industry? Para. 4.3

## **Developing Forest Policy**

*The direction of a new forest policy for Northern Ireland should be guided by the international and European agreements and commitments entered into by the United Kingdom Government.*  
(Paragraph 5.1)

### **Scope for Developing a Forest Policy.**

*Forest policy should seek to realise the maximum benefit to our society from past investment and make proper provision to hand on an adequate area of forest to meet the needs of future generations.*  
(Paragraph 5.2)

*Forest policy should focus on how forests can improve the life and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland.* (Paragraph 5.2)

*There is a need to agree the scope of forest policy between departments and define responsibilities for delivery of the agreed policy.* (Paragraph 5.2)

*There is greater merit in restricting the scope of forest policy to land used for “forestry” and “other wooded land”.* (Paragraph 5.2)

Q4 To what extent will restricting the scope of forest policy to cover only land used for forests and other wooded land result in a gap in broader public policy which is not already covered by other initiatives? Para. 5.2

## **Securing a Competitive Economy.**

*The delivery of regional development opportunity through wood production should continue to be the main policy aim for most forests. (Paragraph 5.3)*

Q5 Should the main policy aim for forestry be delivery of regional development opportunity? Para. 5.3

## **Development of Existing Woodlands**

Q6 Are these the issues? How can these issues be resolved to attract inward investment? Para.5.3.1

## **Increasing the Attractiveness of Northern Ireland for Visitors**

*Forests should be used to improve the attractiveness of landscapes and absorb visitors. (Paragraph 5.3.2)*

Q7 What type of visitor experience should forests provide? Para. 5.3.2

Q8 Where should future forest based visitor development take place? Para. 5.3.2

## **Forest Replacement and Expansion for Development**

*There should be a presumption in favour of replacing productive capacity as it is harvested, so that existing woodland areas will be retained as woodland except where overriding public benefits would result from permanent deforestation. (Paragraph 5.3.3)*

Q9 What is your view on how this policy balances the needs of the environment and economy?  
Para. 5.3.3

*We should continue to obtain most of our requirements for forest products by trade with other regions. (Paragraph 5.3.3)*

*Where forest expansion takes place it should be strategically co-ordinated with other land uses. (Paragraph 5.3.3)*

- Q10 To what extent should forest cover increase and at what rate? Para.5.3.3
- Q11 What types and locations of forests are required? Para. 5.3.3
- Q12 How can the need for additional forest best be reconciled with the need to conserve diversity of habitat and species and other land use demands? Para.5.3.3

## **Ensuring the Protection and Enhancement of the Environment**

*Environmental protection, including environmental improvement and conservation of biodiversity should continue to permeate through future forest policy. (Paragraph 5.4)*

## **Forests and Water**

*Forests are scarce in Northern Ireland, and should continue to be managed for timber production and receive the minimum intervention consistent with the need to grow and produce timber. (Paragraph 5.4.1)*

- Q13 Are there areas of existing forest where management to produce timber is incompatible with the need to collect water and maintain good river quality? Para.5.4.1

## **Forests and Nature Conservation**

*Forest policy should encourage protection and restoration of ancient woodland sites, improvement of the biodiversity value of conifer woodland, and improved management of broadleaved woodlands. Forest expansion should aim to increase the area of broadleaved woodlands. It should also make specific provision for consolidating the most important woodland habitats (which are upland oak woodlands, upland ash woodlands, and wet woodlands), and link woodland and other habitats together. (Paragraph 5.4.2)*

*There is a need for a review of the effectiveness of the controls on the introduction and spread of exotic forest species.(Paragraph 5.4.2)*

- Q14 Where would additional forest protection and habitat improvement activity be of most value? Para.5.4.2

## **Forests and Landscape**

*New planting and replacement of existing forests should add to the quality of the landscape in the most sensitive landscapes, and take account of the impact on the landscape elsewhere by adhering to high standards of design. (Paragraph 5.4.3)*

Q15 Are there particular concerns about the impact of forests on the landscape which need to be addressed? Para.5.4.3

## **Built Heritage and Land Ancillary to Forests**

*Forest policy should continue to support the management of ancillary open land and the built heritage for objectives related to conservation and enjoyment of the countryside. (Paragraph 5.4.4)*

Q16 Is the link between management of forests and conservation of ancillary heritage assets sufficiently strong? In what way should it be altered? Para.5.4.4

Q17 What other environmental issues should be considered? Para.5.4.4

## **Working for a Healthier People**

*The policy objective should be to encourage access to forests so that our people can take exercise to improve the standard of health in the population and to enjoy the benefits of a woodland environment. We should also seek to make forests available to specialist users for sporting and other purposes where there is clear public value in so doing. (Paragraph 5.5).*

Q18 What are the barriers to improving accessibility to forests; and how can these be overcome? Para.5.5

Q19 Which uses of forests create difficulty for other users and how can these be reconciled? Para.5.5

## **Access to Existing Woodland**

*The policy should seek to reduce or remove the barriers to all sections of the community in accessing woodlands. (Paragraph 5.5.1)*

- Q20 What qualitative changes would people find helpful and would increase their enjoyment of forests? Para. 5.5.1
- Q21 Is there evidence that the broad level of charges to forests are a disadvantage to particular groups of society in obtaining access to forests? Para.5.5.1
- Q22 Should charging be extended to more sites to reduce the public burden of maintaining access opportunity? Para.5.5.1
- Q23 Would woodlands be used more effectively if access was a public right rather than by invitation of the forest owner as happens in some other European countries? What would the impact of such a right be on delivery of the policy of managing forests in a sustainable manner? Para. 5.5.1

### **Forest Expansion for Urban Development and Access**

*Forest expansion is desirable to provide an adequate area of woodland offering public access, close to towns and cities. (Paragraph 5.5.2)*

- Q24 Are there areas where new forests and woodlands would make a specific contribution to the life and well-being of urban settlements? Para.5.5.2

### **Use of Forests for Public Education**

*We should be to continue to promote the use of forests in the social development and education of our children. (Paragraph 5.6.1)*

*The use of forests for education should be encouraged where it is practicable. (Paragraph 5.6.1)*

- Q25 What needs to be done to promote wider use of forests for educational purposes? Para.5.6.1
- Q26 Where should the burden fall of interpreting the forest environment to young people? Para. 5.6.1

### **Education and Research for the Forestry Sector**

*There should be access to skills and craft courses in forestry in Northern Ireland which lead to widely recognised qualifications. (Paragraph 5.6.2)*

- Q27 How should the training needs for the forestry and arboricultural sectors be delivered in future? Para.5.6.2

*There should be provision for adequate research to support the contribution forestry can make to the economy, social development and the environment. (Paragraph 5.6.2)*

- Q28 What are the needs for forest and forest products research in Northern Ireland in relation to the contribution that forestry can make to the economy, to social development, and the environment? Para.5.6.2
- Q29 Are there preferences for ensuring access to the results of forest and forest products research? Para. 5.6.2

### **Options For Implementing The Policy**

*The preferred policy approach is that the private sector should play a fuller role in delivering forest policy in Northern Ireland. (Section 6)*

- Q30 Which forms of forest ownership are most likely to secure a competitive forest based economy? Sect.6
- Q31 Are land owners likely to have a significant interest in providing public access to privately owned forests? Sect. 6
- Q32 Should District Councils have a greater responsibility for delivering public benefits from forests? Sect. 6
- Q33 How should future grant aid be targeted to secure the greatest public benefit from forests at least cost? Sect.6
- Q34 Which areas of forestry are likely to require increased regulation to secure the most important policy objectives and public benefits? Sect. 6

Name of your organisation.

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# FORESTRY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

## A P P E N D I X B

### EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF FOREST POLICY

#### 1. Equality Impact Assessment

The Forest Service, which is an executive agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), has commenced a review of forest policy in Northern Ireland. This presents an opportunity for the Service formally to assess the impact of its policies and practice from an equality perspective on the nine groups identified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This assessment flows from an obligation under the Act which requires Public Authorities to set out in an Equality Scheme how they propose to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75.

DARD's Equality Scheme committed it to assessing policies relating to access to forests for recreation and educational purposes. All forest policy and practice can now be evaluated through this policy review process.

#### 2. Proposed Policy Aims

The reasons for the review of forest policy are outlined in Paragraph 1.1 (pages 18 and 19) of this paper. These centre on the changed policy background since the last review in 1970, the increasing maturity of forests and the emerging social, economic and environmental needs and opportunities to make use of forests.

The main recommendations flowing from the review are that -

- the existing policy of managing forests in a sustainable manner should continue,
- the primary thrust of policy should centre on developing the economic value of the timber resource and promoting tourism,
- development should be subject to constraints of conserving and enhancing the environment; and
- access to forests for all should be encouraged so that people are afforded enhanced opportunities for exercise, for general enjoyment and for education in the forest environment.

#### 3. Promoting Equality of Opportunity.

To meet its equality obligations under Section 75 of the Act, the Department is obliged to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between-

Persons of different religious belief  
Persons of different political opinion  
Persons from different racial groups

Persons of different ages  
Persons of different marital status  
Persons of different sexual orientation  
Men and women generally  
Persons with a disability and persons without.  
Persons with dependants and persons without

These are the Section 75 groups.

#### **4. Promoting Good Relations**

In addition the Department is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between:

Persons of different religious belief  
Persons of different political opinion  
Persons from different racial groups

#### **5. Aim of Equality Impact Assessment**

The aim of this equality impact assessment is to identify whether forest policy and practice creates differential impacts or has the potential to enhance equality of opportunity among any of the Section 75 groups. If a differential impact is identified in respect of any of the groups the Department will carry out a full Equality Impact Assessment to see if it can modify the policy or delivery of the policy to reduce the impact.

Where a differential impact is identified as a result of an aspect of the policy arising from European Union legislation the Department will advise the appropriate institution(s) of the European Union.

#### **6. Consultation**

Some aspects of the operation of forest policy have probably created differential impact on at least some of the Section 75 groups. For example surveys show that some groups appear to be under-represented or experience difficulties gaining access to forests or have difficulty using the paths, toilets and other buildings within forests. Some works programmes are in progress to facilitate access to forests for disabled people. However through this consultation process the Department would like to gather updated, comprehensive and reliable data to determine more precisely the extent and nature of any impact on all Section 75 groups in the delivery of policy concerned with-

- the maintenance, protection and expansion of forests, including the provision of grants to encourage private planting,
- the promotion of the supply of wood from within Northern Ireland for industrial use,
- the promotion of public access to and use of NI forests; and
- the protection and conservation of forests and the associated areas of special natural and heritage interest.

We would like to know if-

- you consider that there is lower participation by any Section 75 group in the delivery of forest policy, and if so which ones and how?
- you see any opportunity to amend forest policy or practice to improve participation by any Section 75 group. If so we would be interested to hear your suggestions.
- you consider that there is any aspect of forest policy or practice that causes particular difficulties to any Section 75 group. If so which ones and how?
- you consider that there is an opportunity to further promote equality of opportunity by altering policy or practice. If so in what way?
- you consider that there is an opportunity to promote good relations by altering policy or practice. If so in what way?

Please also indicate whether you consider that there is a differential impact of any element of the policies under review among any of the Section 75 groups. If so please state the nature of the impact and which Section 75 group(s) you believe is affected. You may of course wish to add further comments and the Department will be happy to receive these. All comments will be fully considered.

The policy recommendations at paragraphs 8, 17, 18, 27, 29 of the Summary on pages 7-14 of this document may be of particular interest to Section 75 groups.

## 7. How to respond to this Document

Information on how to respond and about available assistance is contained on pages 13 and 14 of the main document.

## 8. Publication

In the event of a full Equality Impact Assessment being required this will be made publicly available. The assessment will be accessible on the Forest Service Internet site at [www.forestserviceni.gov.uk](http://www.forestserviceni.gov.uk) and the DARD Internet site at [www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk). Printed copies can also be obtained from-

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Name of your organisation.

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