

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

## GNÓ COMHALTAÍ PRÍOBHÁIDEACHA PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

*Fógra Tairisceana: Notice of Motion*

“That Dáil Éireann:

acknowledges:

- that Ireland has the second lowest forest cover in the European Union (EU) at 11 per cent, compared to a European average of 30 per cent and that the majority of the forests are monocultures;
- that the State forestry policy has been predominantly based on a rotation, clear-fell and replant cycle using monoculture;
- that the extent of hedgerows declined massively during the 20th century but has since recovered slightly;
- that having started from a forest cover of 1 per cent in 1923, the State and the forestry industry has grown substantially, and afforestation has brought major positive benefits including the development of a forestry sector and forest products industry that currently employs 12,000 people;
- that aspects of the current afforestation model, in particular the emphasis on large-scale monoculture have, in some cases, had negative impacts on local communities, biodiversity, water quality and landscapes;
- that in the light of the need to address the challenges of the climate and biodiversity emergency, now is the time to move to the next stage in Irish forestry;
- that it is desirable for the forestry system to provide a range of services in a way which strengthens local communities, provides employment for a new generation of foresters and access for the public to more varied woodlands, which are rich in biodiversity;
- that there is a potential for higher value, higher quality wood products from Irish forests, including a potential for long-lasting products as low carbon inputs for construction and other sectors and as stores of sequestered carbon for the lifetime of the buildings and products;
- the declining populations in certain rural areas, the high average age of farmers, and the developing crisis in Irish agriculture; and
- the inappropriate nature of current land use in many parts of Ireland, including the inability to make a living from current farming models and the difficulty for young people who might want to work on the land to get access to land which they do not directly inherit;

notes:

- the impacts of biodiversity loss and the loss of ecosystem services, and the consequent economic losses and risks we face globally and in Ireland;
- the gravity of the global biodiversity crisis, including the loss of species, the loss of important populations of species and the undermining of ecosystem services;
- the vital role of land use in the hydrological cycle, managing flooding and drought, maintaining water quality and dealing with pollution and the role which changed land use practices must play in meeting the objectives of improving water quality in line with the EU Water Framework Directive;

- the vulnerability of even-aged monoculture plantations, e.g. to disease, fire and windthrow, especially given the increasing dangers of climate change;
- the role which changed land use practices must play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in sequestering and storing carbon, and in providing resilience to the effects of climate change;
- the essential role that afforestation, land use and soil carbon management must play in Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) 2021-2030, which is to be drafted by the end of this year; and
- the commitments Ireland has entered into, in the context of the Natura 2000 network and the EU Birds and Habitats Directives to protect habitats and species, and the fact that Ireland is failing to meet those commitments and that biodiversity loss is continuing, as demonstrated in Ireland's reports under Article 16 of the EU Birds and Habitats Directive;

agrees:

- that Ireland was once covered by great forests and that our mild climate and the influence of the Gulf Stream make for one of the best habitats for trees in the world;
- that the Irish population wants to spend more time in nature and the public health benefits of enabling them to do so;
- the economic value of ecotourism and associated economic activities; and
- that the success of rewilding initiatives in other countries, and the plans for a recognised wilderness area in the Nephin range, as well as Coillte's recent recognition of the amenity value of forestry in the Dublin and Wicklow mountains; and

calls on the Government to:

- make a fundamental change in forestry policy away from a narrow vision of 30 year cycle to a permanent woodland approach that would provide greater and more diverse social, environmental and economic benefits to society as a whole;
- move away from large-scale monoculture of fast-growing species such as Sitka spruce on 'marginal land' towards mixed, diverse forestry, with a wider range of forest types (short rotation, longer rotations, agroforestry, semi-wild) delivering a range of services and benefits and forest products;
- rebalance the premiums and payments made for planting and thinning to support this strategic change in Irish forestry;
- start the restoration of large areas of natural woodlands, formerly the dominant terrestrial ecosystems of Ireland, including the productive use of much of them through a system of continuous cover and close to nature forestry;
- begin a national programme of transformation of existing young, even-aged monoculture forests to continuous cover forestry;
- implement the recommendation of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Climate Action, accepted and endorsed by the Dáil on 9th May, for a review of land use to inform a national land use plan;
- establish a system of local forestry plans, developed in an open participative process including all parts of civil society, in each county, informed by the national land-use plan, which would form the framework for Government support for small-scale afforestation in the county;
- use Strategic Environmental Assessment to develop these local forestry plans, to ensure the meeting of objectives, including carbon sequestration, water quality and hydrology, biodiversity protection and restoration, landscape and public amenity;
- provide for these local forestry plans to include financial support for small-scale afforestation with mixed woodland with a high proportion of native species in all parts of the country;
- provide budgetary support to enable every registered farm holding to plant a hectare of natural

woodland on their land within the next five years, on agreed sites within the farm which minimise the effect on farm operations and maximise the biodiversity and ecosystem service benefits;

- develop opportunities for community ownership of and community investment in afforestation within national forestry policy and local forestry plans;
- reorient national supports and incentives for afforestation in line with the local forestry plans in the direction of forestry closer to nature;
- provide better support for the restoration and planting of new hedgerows to provide biodiversity corridors, carbon shelters and nutrients in our agricultural system;
- engage local authorities and local communities in a radical expansion of urban tree planting and neighbourhood and community forests and for urban trees and forests;
- resource the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Council for Forest Research and Development (COFORD) and forestry non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at a level appropriate for them to carry out all of their functions and develop new areas of responsibility;
- review the objectives and legal structure of Coillte to establish a new mandate for the company which delivers multiple benefits from forestry, including environmental and community objectives as well as the production of high-quality timber;
- establish better educational infrastructure and funding to support apprenticeship programmes in forest management in line with the new forestry policy;
- increase investment in higher and further education and training as well as for the modernisation of equipment available for craft apprenticeship provision to conduct such a transformation of existing strands; and
- promote the use of high-quality wood materials in new building construction, including by amending building regulations, and to encourage Irish enterprise agencies to further support the development of local enterprises which develop a wide range of products to use natural wood material. — *Eamon Ryan, Catherine Martin.*