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Minister Doyle Updates On Burnt Agricultural And Forestry Land

Department Investigating All Of The Recent Incidents Of Illegal Burning Of Land

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Andrew Doyle, T.D., today provided an update on the issue of the recent illegal burning on agricultural and forestry land that has led to the outbreak of serious fires in various counties throughout the country. This update follows Minister Doyle's recent visit to the site of the recent gorse fires in Cloosh Valley in Galway. Recent extensive wildfires throughout the country have caused significant damage to substantial areas of agricultural and forestry land.

Minister Doyle commenting on the damage said *"Officials in my Department are currently analysing a wide range of satellite imagery to identify land which was burnt illegally during the specified closed season for burning. Historic satellite imagery is also being examined as part of this process. Agricultural and eligible forestry land identified as burnt illegally as part of this investigation will be deemed ineligible for payment under the 2017 Basic Payment and other area-based schemes."*

The Minister advised farmers and their advisors, of the following in relation to agricultural and eligible forestry land which is burnt illegally during the closed season – i.e. 1st March to 31st August.:

- Such land is not eligible for payment under the Basic Payment Scheme and other area-based schemes;
- Farmers who have included illegally burnt land in their 2017 Basic Payment Scheme application, already submitted to the Department, should now remove this land by means of submitting an Amendment Form prior to the closing date for receipt of amendments, i.e. 31 May or 9 June with penalty;
- Inclusion of illegally burnt land in the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme application may result in reduced payment and penalties under this scheme and the other area-based schemes, e.g. Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme;
- Where it is identified, as part of the current investigation, that lands were burnt during the closed season this may result in such land being inspected by Department officials.

Minister Doyle concluded; *“My Department is actively investigating all of the recent incidents of illegal burning of land using the most up-to-date technology/satellite imagery. My Department will not tolerate incidences of illegal burning of land and will take all necessary actions to ensure compliance with the conditions of the various EU funded area-based schemes, including reducing payments and penalties where applicable”.*

Note for Editors

The burning of vegetation is controlled by the Wildlife Acts. It is an offence under Section 40 of the Wildlife Act, 1976 (amended by Section 46 of the Wildlife Act, 2000) to burn, from 1st March to 31st August in any year, any vegetation growing on any land not then cultivated. Individuals who are found to burn vegetation within that prohibited period are liable to prosecution by An Garda Síochána or by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). DAFM has no role in regard to prosecutions.

Applicants under the Basic Payment Scheme and other area-based schemes are obliged to comply with Cross Compliance which includes requirements in relation to the burning of vegetation and the consequential damage to designated land. Where an applicant is found, at inspection or on receipt of a Cross Report from NPWS, to have been responsible for breaching these requirements a penalty can be applied to payments due under these schemes.

Land found to have been burned during the specified closed season for burning is considered automatically ineligible under the various support schemes

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