

None So Hardy (Forestry) Ltd

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Submission for Draft New Forestry Programme 2014-2020

To whom it may concern

As the main plant supplier to the private afforestation scheme we feel the urgent need to comment on the proposals being laid out .

5.10 : Forest Environment and Climate Services: Forest Genetic Reproductive Material.

We fully agree with the need of establishment of new production areas such as seed orchards. It is however a huge step backwards if we go down the road of Seed Stands. When selecting seed sources it would make sense to use improved material which came from adapted plus trees irrespective of what provenance they are. The original plus trees selected for the Forestry Commission were second generation trees that showed they had adapted. The majority of the trees were selected from stands believed to be Q.C.I. origin. Progeny testing was then carried out with seed germinated from these selections; as a result of these tests 200 “plus” trees were selected for the general breeding programme.

The current seed orchard material available shows a slight loss of density due to the increased vigour (10%) , however this has been shown to be compensated by the improved stem form(8-10%) and the lighter branching , this means that the lower wood density had no effect on the pass rate of sawn timber. Combine this with the fact that you tend to get a more uniform crop from improved material it makes sense to use improved material ahead of unimproved Washington material. At the end of the day the quality of the end product is every bit as important as growth

We should be looking to establish our own seed orchards as is laid out in the draft proposals but until these are producing we should be still using the best available material in our forests.

The priority funding is also being funnelled towards Improved Washington Sitka Spruce. This seems to us to be a huge gamble. These improved Washington Trees have shown gains in growth but the quality of the timber is not known. Long term we need to satisfy ourselves

and our customers what is the right Sitka for them. Current indications are that our customers are more than happy with the improved material we are currently supplying. It must be realised that when we had an ample supply of both unimproved Washington Sitka and unimproved Q.C.I Sitka most of our customers opted for Q.C.I. We need to see the results from Genetic Gain Trials that were planted around 1992/1993 across the UK. Also was there any similar trials carried out here (if not why not and should we not establish some now).

Among the objectives for the new Forestry Programme is the establishment of 350Ha of Seed Orchards/Stands every year for the five years of the programme. This culminates in a total of 2,100 ha of Orchards/Stands. Where has this figure come from? The UK are currently self sufficient, plus exports, with Improved Sitka Seed. They have approximately 40ha of orchards across the country which supplies enough seed to produce 35-40 million trees annually. This is exactly why we need to sit down and work out this strategy in a more cohesive and structured manner.

Our proposal is that a steering group is got together to include everybody from Nursery Men through Foresters and onto Processors and to make an informed and objective decision on what material we should use to stock our seed orchards to fulfil the huge potential of our forests.

5.1 Afforestation Scheme Details.

There is a mixed message coming from this part of the document. For the past few years there has been an aspiration to reach a target of 14-15,000 ha of afforestation per annum to bring our forest cover up from well below the EU average. Realistically we knew that it would have to be a gradual increase from the 6-7000 level we are currently at. The benefit of building this level up gradually has been well recognised and we all hoped it would happen during this new programme. Even in **Section 5.1.3.4** it states an objective of increasing the land cover to 18% and establishing “up to 9,000 ha of new forests and woodlands per annum” However in Section 5.1 Table 7 , The objectives are well below this target and a very modest programme has been set out with only 6,300 Ha been targeted for 2015 with small increases each year culminating with a target of 9000 ha for the final year of the programme. What is the explanation for this? It completely ignores the targets we have aspired to.

A lot of work has been done recently around the issue of unenclosed Land. The Farrelly/Gallagher report has highlighted the merits of this land and how best it can be turned into productive forestry land. For this land to be given the chance of producing valuable timber in the future it needs a grant on an equal footing with other potential forestry land. On the basis that grants/premiums are comparable with other classifications a

huge breakthrough can be made on this. If a pilot scheme was set in motion by the minister , based on this report, and run under the auspices of IFFPA with the co-operation of the Forestry Companies ,any issues arising could be ironed out and the best of this land could be planted. After all 60% of the Coillte estate is producing timber with great success on this type of land.