



Public Consultation Process Summary

Held on the review of our Business Area Unit (BAU) strategic plans for 2016-2020

Background

During the second half of 2015, following a public consultation process, Coillte created draft strategic plans for the period 2016-2020. There were two stages: an initial/scoping phase in July/August 2015, and secondly a draft plan stage in October/November 2015, both allowing a 6 week feedback period. Submissions were received from a range of stakeholders including individuals, local community groups, NGO's, recreation and sporting organisations, local councils, national government authorities and educational institutions.

How was the public consultation process carried out?

- Coillte updated its website and social media sites to announce the public consultation process.
- An extensive media advertising campaign was launched, with adverts appearing in national and regional papers.
- Mailshots were issued to all stakeholders registered with Coillte.
- Coillte developed a web map application which went live for the draft plan stage to allow stakeholders to view proposed areas for felling during this timeframe.
- Coillte advised stakeholders that meetings could be organised on request.

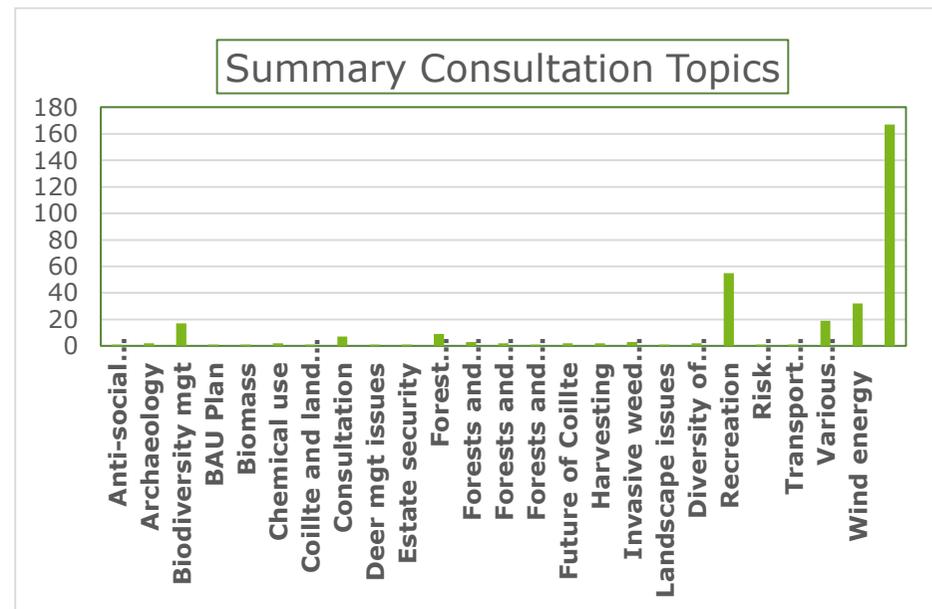
The following graphic provides a summary of the consultation topics provided by the 160 submissions, 142 relating to forestry aspects of

our business, 22 relating to our wind energy involvement as well as 257 petition letters relating to wind energy.

Topics included requests for further recreational development, concerns about wind energy, biodiversity management, use of chemicals in Coillte forests and many others.

All submissions were acknowledged, logged and assigned to respective teams for review, consideration and specific response. As a result of this public consultation process, some changes have been incorporated into Coillte's plans. Click here to view Coillte's plans

<http://www.coillte.ie/coillteforest/plans/>



The following pages provide more detail in relation to a selection of topics raised and Coillte's response.



Recreation

Of particular interest to Coillte stakeholders was the area of recreation provision. Stakeholders expressed their concern at the apparent lack of maintenance at Coillte managed amenity areas, requesting a more active approach towards the proper maintenance of current recreational sites, for use by the public. Some of the areas highlighted for improvement and enhancement were Rossmore Forest Park and Castleshane Woods, in Co. Monaghan, Aghrane woods, Ballygar, Co. Galway.

Respondents also requested that Coillte actively increase development of new/additional recreational amenities in various parts of the country.

Coillte welcomed input to this consultation process from organisations such as Mountaineering Ireland, Irish Orienteering Association, Sport Ireland and Keep Ireland Open.

Coillte Response

Coillte acknowledges that a considerable number of submissions received regarded the lack of maintenance of recreation infrastructure open to the public. Over the past 4 years, Coillte have targeted the maintenance of trails and other recreation infrastructure across the

estate to bring them up to a higher standard and make our trails fit-for-purpose.

Coillte has more than 2000kms of waymarked trails open to the public, across 230 recreation sites. Coillte has invested more than €3M on trails' repair and upgrades over the past 4 years and we have programmes of continuous improvement working towards providing good quality recreation experiences for the public every year. We do understand that some sites do not provide the very best offering possible and are committed to working on these where resources allow.

We will be targeting our forest parks for specific improvement works in late 2015/ 2016 and we request that the public continue to bring lack of maintenance to our attention, referring specifically to locations and issues which they feel need attention.

In relation to development of new/additional recreational amenities, Coillte actively encourage external parties to work with us to develop new recreational facilities each year. We have many examples of partnerships where new and exciting facilities were developed such as the Cavan Burren forest park, Lough Key Activity park, Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Centre and other smaller developments over the past 10 years.

We welcome proposals for new developments and undertake to examine each of them that we receive and try to work where possible to deliver benefits to the partner, to Coillte and to the public.

Coillte have responded directly to all submissions in relation to Recreation facilities. Specifically in the case of Rossmore and Castleshane in Monaghan, the local Coillte team invited all those who made submissions to a consultation field day to discuss the issues on site.

For further information on Coillte's recreational facilities please click on www.coillteoutdoors.ie

Coillte's wind energy strategy

A large number of stakeholders expressed deep concerns around Coillte's involvement in wind energy, including specific projects which stakeholders did not want to see developed. As a result of the large number of submissions received on this topic, Coillte's wind team created a comprehensive set of Frequently Asked Questions based on the content of the submissions. Each submission was then responded to by the wind team. Additional information about our wind energy business was also added to our BAU strategic plans.

Coillte Response

Coillte's land provides some of the best onshore wind potential due to there altitude, aspect and location. It is particularly suitable for wind farm development due to its remoteness, accessibility, distance from dwellings and visibility relative to areas with high scenic amenity.

Coillte is a significant contributor to Ireland's renewable energy 2020 target for electricity consumption through renewable sources. Coillte is fully aligned with Government and EU policy in terms of the role we play in relation to wind energy development in Ireland.

Our strategy to maximise the potential of each hectare we manage which includes the development of renewable energy.

Please see the Wind Energy Section of the Coillte website to view the FAQ's. Should you require further information on Coilltes' wind energy programme, please see www.coillte.ie or contact the Energy Team at windenergy@coillte.ie

Coillte Biomass involvement

Several stakeholders including Westmeath Environmental Group, An Taisce and others were interested in Coillte's work in the biomass area and how we manage dependence on fossil fuels.

Coillte Response

As biomass is a limited and valuable indigenous resource Coillte harness it to maximises it value. We provide competitive, long term and secure biomass fuel supply contracts to our woodchip clients and assists in the evaluation of both the technical and commercial viability of projects for large scale industrial energy users.

We operate a number of regional biomass fuel supply hubs throughout the country, with a

Coillte provide full chain of custody from forest to boiler (“stump to steam”) and all wood chip is produced strictly in accordance with quality specifications set out in I.S. CEN/TS 14961 : 2005, with significant emphasis on optimisation of wood flow to minimise haulage distances for all transportation required.

Coillte are in favour of developing and supporting the bioenergy sector here in Ireland. Locally produced, indigenous biomass provides competitive energy for Irish industry, allowing for the future displacement of fossil fuel.

For more information on Coillte’s biomass, please contact our team at biomass@coillte.ie

Use of Cypermethrin in Coillte’s forests

Concerns were expressed by stakeholders, including Westmeath Environmental Group, Neil Foulkes, Woodlands of Ireland, and Jerome Savage, on Coillte’s application for a derogation for use of Cypermethrin in our forests to FSC^{®1}.

¹FSC licence code FSC- C005714

Coillte Response

Coillte did apply to the FSC for derogation for the use of Cypermethrin in May 2015. This application outlined the difficulty Coillte have in relation to the large pine weevil in our reforestation sites and how we had adopted an Integrated Pest Management approach to pest management. Details of this information can be found at this link

www.coillte.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Application/Republic_of_Ireland-application_form_for_cypermethrin_derogation-2015.pdf

Coillte use pesticides authorised for use in Ireland, by the Pesticides Registration and Control Division [PRCD], Dept. of Agriculture and Food – the regulatory authority for pesticide use in this country. Cypermethrin is authorised for use in Ireland by the PRCD.

Consultation and Land Sales

A number of stakeholders expressed concern about the sale of Coillte land and wished to express their desire for full consultation in advance of any such sales.

Coillte response

Each year Coillte sells, leases or develops a limited area of Coillte land, for purposes other than forestry. Most sales are made in response to local demand and typically comprise house sites, isolated dwelling

houses, small outlying forest properties, small areas of forest to neighbouring land owners, gravel pits, land to local authorities for infrastructure projects and land for development.

Properties sold are those where their overall value greatly exceeds their land value for forestry purposes. A signing-off committee within Coillte considers all land sales, with larger sales requiring the approval of the Board of Directors. Joint development approaches with local communities are favoured. Development or lease of Coillte lands is not entered into until the consultation/planning process is completed. This includes consultation in particular with local people and communities.

Deer Management

Following the consultation process with stakeholders, additional information to the BAU strategic plans was included.

Coillte Response:

Through browsing and bark-stripping trees, the deer can have a considerable negative impact on tree species selection as well as the quality, yield and survival of forest crops.

It is Coillte's policy to manage deer in accordance with accepted principles of Sustainable Deer Management (SDM) whereby, the conservation, control and use of the species, are balanced in order to achieve an integrated and collaborative solution to maintaining viable

deer populations at levels which are in harmony with their environment.

A key aspect of our deer management is establishing a collaborative approach between all key stakeholders within the deer's range at landscape level. A considerable element of this process is the acceptance of shared responsibility by all landowners in an area, their role in ensuring the effective management of the deer utilising their lands.

Coillte has demonstrated commitment and leadership in recent years in developing collaborative deer management and the establishment of training standards for deer hunters. At national level Coillte was instrumental in the establishment of the Hunter Competence Assessment programme and the Irish Deer Management Forum. At regional, and local level Coillte are active participants in a number of deer management partnerships and groups.

Coillte maintain Deer Management Plans (DMP) for all areas where deer are present. A summary of our deer management policy can be viewed on www.coillteoutdoors.ie

Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Measures

Stakeholders requested to know more about how we manage protection of archaeological and cultural heritage on Coillte land.

Coillte Response

Coillte as stewards of the State's forestry land has a duty to respect the cultural heritage attached to it. With support and advice from the NPWS we have developed a code of practice in order to protect this archaeological and cultural heritage.

Coillte's BAU's will continue to protect archaeological sites on our lands and note any new sites located during surveys. All recorded archaeological monuments are highlighted during the planning stage of operations. They are identified and fenced off on site by the manager to ensure their protection. Pedestrian access from the nearest public road is provided for such sites. Unrecorded archaeological monuments when located are immediately protected and reported to the Environmental Officer. The Forest Service Archaeologist is also notified who advises accordingly. BAU's will continue to support sites of cultural and literary heritage and will identify, protect and record all new items of heritage which are discovered on our lands.

Environmental Enhancement Measures

An area of keen interest to stakeholders, including Woodlands of Ireland is how Coillte manage biodiversity and assurance that our work maintains the environment into the future.

Coillte Response:

Coillte have a range of environmental enhancement measures which aim to ensure we preserve and maintain our environmental resource into the future for the benefit of all.

- **Diversification of Species**

Coillte policy is to encourage species diversification in order to maintain and enhance the productive potential of its estate and to increase biodiversity in its forests.

To reduce the need for artificial fertilisation programmes, a more cautious species selection is being applied within the BAU, so that the species planted will not need supplementary fertiliser over its rotation.

- **Practicing Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS)**

The selection of a silvicultural system on a forest site is based on a number of different factors. The decisions are based on: site stability, the management objective of the site (i.e. timber production or biodiversity), and the surrounding landscape.

The list below explains the area where the various silvicultural systems that collectively are known as low impact silvicultural systems (LISS) are adopted. Low Impact Silviculture Systems such as Continuous Cover Forestry, are regarded as alternative methods of silvicultural management to clearfelling. The introduction of LISS systems can only be achieved gradually and can take up to a rotation length to complete.

Areas currently managed in our BAU's under LISS:

1. Sites on Coillte Estate managed under LISS
2. Old Woodland Sites (OWS)
3. All Broadleaf High Forest (BHF) stands are to be managed under CCF
4. Amenity sites
5. Agreed Biodiversity Areas where current or target habitat is woodland where appropriate according to Biodiversity Management Plan
6. Management Units currently listed for management under LISS, where silvicultural system equals Small Coup Felling (SCF), Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF), Long Term Retention (LTR), Natural Regeneration (NRE)
7. CCF demonstration sites
8. Scots pine stands, where stability and vegetation provides for Natural regeneration

- **Management of Biodiversity areas**

Coillte previously commissioned ecological surveys on its estate to identify areas of maximum biodiversity value and to draw up management plans for those areas. The findings of each of the completed surveys, were incorporated into our plans which were consulted on a number of years ago.

In addition, HCVF (High Conservation Value Forest) areas in each of Coillte's BAU's largely overlap with areas designated for nature conservation, either nationally under the Wildlife Act as Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) or under European Law in the form of the Habitats Directive as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protected Areas for birds (SPA). Some old woodland sites across the Coillte estate have the potential to be classified as HCVF and these sites are identified through Coillte's old woodland assessment procedure.

All management operations in HCVF areas are designed to maintain and/or enhance the designated conservation value.

Forests and water management

Coillte's management of pearl mussel catchments was of concern to stakeholders such as Inland Fisheries Ireland, an area of its management which is taken very seriously.

Coillte Response

Coillte takes its responsibilities for the protection of water quality, amongst a range of other environmental receptors, very seriously. Over the last number of years, we have adopted a number of initiatives to ensure compliance with Forest Service Water Protection Guidelines, including Forestry & Water Quality Guidelines and Freshwater Pearl Mussel Requirements resulting in Coillte receiving FSC & PEFC Certification since 2001 and 2014 respectively.

Through an initiative developed and implemented with the co-operation of the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine in 2013, we have adopted an EMS approach (ISO 14001) to forest planning, quality assessments of forest practices and the implementation of an annual quality improvement programme.

Since the early 1990s, Coillte has been proactive in working with universities and other state agencies to gain a greater understanding of the interaction of commercial forest operations and water quality. In more recent years, it has either been an active partner and/or supported projects, such as EPA/COFORD funded HYDROFOR and CROW projects. The latter project in particular, with the focus on

aquatic buffer zone (ABZ) management, has shed further light on the efficacy of installing ABZs, since their stipulation in the Forest Service Water Quality Guidelines in the early 1990s.

Coillte have also, together with other cross sectoral agencies, such as Teagasc, Department of Agriculture (DAFM), Forest Service – DAFM and NPWS, successfully obtained funding under the EU Life Programme for the investigation of environmentally sensitive and sustainable forest and agriculture management practices in two prioritised freshwater pearl mussel catchments in Co. Kerry. It is hoped that the findings from the KerryLIFE project (2013 to 2019), will guide land management practices in ensuring the protection and conservation of this nationally (and internationally) endangered aquatic species.

Upland habitats and species

A number of stakeholders were concerned that designated upland habitats and species are under intense pressure from further afforestation.

Coillte Response:

Coillte are currently engaging with the NPWS in the development of a National Threat Response Plan for Ireland to benefit Hen Harrier conservation. Among the measures called for by Coillte are annual

bird surveys of the species until 2020 and nest monitoring to understand the pressures impacting upon the species. Coillte look forward to the publication of this plan later in 2016.

Conifer plantations, broadleaf mix

Stakeholders expressed a wish that monoculture coniferous forestry should not continue to be developed so intensively, regardless of its deleterious impacts on biodiversity and habitat destruction, water quality, and amenity.

Coillte Response:

The Irish forestry sector is based, and depends on, the clearfell-and-replant system of timber production for its survival and success. However, we implement alternative silvicultural systems on certain sites, where site conditions are suitable and/or where there are overriding environmental or social reasons to do so.

While Coillte's forests do consist primarily of conifer forests, within these forests, there is usually a diversity of habitats present. Most plantation forests have roads and ridelines which usually support species-rich vegetation and scrub. They provide important habitat diversity within the forest, and are havens for wildlife. For example, the butterfly species marsh fritillary (listed on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive) occurs along ridelines in some Coillte conifer

forests. Furthermore, certain species of conservation concern in Ireland have in fact benefitted from the spread of conifer plantations over recent decades, e.g. red squirrel and pine marten.

Pests and diseases

Stakeholders were interested to see progress relating to the management of pests and diseases.

Coillte Response:

Coillte is continually investigating natural methods of controlling that most difficult pest 'Pine Weevil' and we are continually trialling different methods such as (1) artificial covers, (2). Nematodes etc. However none of these methods have given near the level of success that is needed and as such Cypermethrin is still used. Weevil numbers are assessed in advance of all use of the chemical in the field and only where numbers of the insect present a significant threat to the establishment of the forest is the chemical applied. In relation to other diseases Coillte carry out three major surveys of its estate on an annual basis (1). A Chalara Survey for Ash Dieback (2). A Phytophthora Survey for Phytophthora Ramorum and (3). An annual health check survey where over 160 sites are examined across the country for any disease that might be present. Any diseases that are detected are reported to the Forest Service, part of the Department of The Agriculture, as they are the regulatory authority.