

Response ID ANON-XK6U-4M36-R

Submitted to Strategic Vision for our Future Forest Estate
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About you

Please confirm that you have read and understand the privacy notice.

I confirm that I have read and understand the privacy notice:

Yes

What is your email address?

Email:

irishwildlife@iwt.ie

What is your name?

Name:

Padraic Fogarty

In which County do you live?

County/country:

Dublin

If "Outside of Ireland", which country do you live in?:

Dublin

What age are you?

Age group:

35 - 54

What best describes the location in which you currently live?

City

I am submitting on behalf of:

NGO

If "other", please specify in the box below. :

I understand that only one entry per individual will be accepted for this consultation and that any duplicate entries will be removed from the results.

I have read and understood the above:

Yes

Forests for climate

How important are Irish forests in helping to address the climate crisis?

Very important

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

Planting trees - how strongly do you agree? - Coillte should grow more trees and increase its forest cover significantly and quickly to combat global warming.:

Strongly agree

Planting trees - how strongly do you agree? - Planting trees, such as conifers, that grow quickly and capture carbon at a high rate is important for climate mitigation.:

Strongly disagree

Planting trees - how strongly do you agree? - Planting trees, such as broadleaves, that provide a long-term store of carbon is important for climate mitigation.:

Strongly agree

Coillte's ambition to create 100,000 hectares* of new forests by 2050 is:

Too little

Please provide further detail to your response to the question above if required.:

As the state forestry company, Coillte can play a vital role in helping to deliver on Ireland's climate and biodiversity goals. This goes beyond merely establishing and managing forests for commercial purposes. We welcome the commitment to deliver 50% of new forests just for nature and Coillte should be strategic about this - i.e. restoring and expanding existing (and especially old forests) will deliver more for biodiversity than planting from scratch. Natural regeneration should be used where possible and, again, will deliver more for nature than planting on its own. Native woodlands near water courses/along river corridors will enhance ecological connectivity while delivering water quality benefits. The goal of reaching 100,000 hectares by 2050 would help to deliver just about one fifth of our existing goal to increase forest cover to 18%. In this light the target does not seem very ambitious, particularly as the forthcoming Forest Strategy is likely to aim for an even higher level of forest cover.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement below?

Strongly agree

How strongly do you agree or disagree with Coillte's ambition to redesign* peatland forests that are a significant carbon emission risk?

Strongly agree

Please provide further detail to your response to the question above if required.:

There is enormous opportunity for Coillte to deliver peatland restoration with rewilding. However the target of 30,000 hectares is too low and Coillte's existing estate on peatland is much greater than this figure. Coillte had previously reported that it has 232,000 hectares of forestry on peatland so the proposal to rewet/rewild merely 13% of this is far too modest.

Coillte needs to rewet/rewild all of its peatland sites. Where this is compatible with native woodland restoration it can also help to meet woodland establishment targets.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement below?

Neutral

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement below?

Neutral

Have you any additional comments to add on our Forests for Climate ambitions?

Have you any additional comments to add on our Forests for Climate ambitions?:

The Irish Wildlife Trust supports the development of wind energy infrastructure however this should not be on peatlands, where the climate and biodiversity benefits would be better optimised through rewetting/rewilding.

The idea of product substitution only delivers benefits for climate in a scenario where fossil fuel intensive products are being reduced. There is no evidence that this actually happens. Similarly, we should not be promoting the use of biomass for burning unless in exceptional circumstances. Without drastic reductions in fossil fuel use, biomass does not help to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Indeed, burning wood releases more GHGs per unit of energy than coal while promoting the use of biomass would be detrimental to biodiversity given that we need more trees to stay in the ground for longer.

Forests for nature

How important are Ireland's forests for nature and biodiversity?

Very important

Are you aware that over 90,000 hectares of our estate (c.20%) is managed by Coillte primarily* for biodiversity?

Yes

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement below?

Strongly agree

Half of the 100,000 hectares of new forests in our vision will be native woodlands. Is this:

Too little

Please provide further detail to your response to the question above if required. :

Coillte has not been transparent about the 20% of its estate which is claimed is managed for biodiversity. There is no website to show where these places are, why they are important for biodiversity and what/if any management measures are being taken. For this figure to be credible, this data must be provided.

Coillte's estate is currently doing more harm than good for biodiversity. It is important that biodiversity becomes a central principle of all operations (commercial as well as areas primarily for nature). To achieve this the company requires a radical overhaul of its business model. Short-rotation monocultures which are then clear-felled are disastrous for climate, biodiversity and water. Coillte should aim to have 100% of its estate as 'nature-friendly'. The strategy should not be limited to only 50% of the estate being just for nature, as likely our biodiversity and climate needs will require more than this.

Coillte's near term ambition that 30% of our forests and lands are managed primarily for nature is:

Too little

Please provide further detail to your response to the question above if required.:

Coillte has been too slow in adapting to the realities of climate/biodiversity collapse. We see that even now, peatlands are being replanted with monoculture of non-native conifers when we know that urgent action is needed to restore all of our peatlands. A lot more needs to be doing to increase the area of land which is managed only for nature on the Coillte estate.

Coillte's long term ambition that 50% of our forests and lands are managed primarily for nature is:

Too little

Please provide further detail to your response to the question above if required.:

We are reluctant to agree that 50% is sufficient in the absence of data showing how much permanent, native forest we need in Ireland to restore natural ecosystems, protect soil and restore good water status in our rivers.

Have you any additional comments to add on our Forests for Nature ambitions?

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Coillte is uniquely placed to deliver rewilding on a large scale. There is no other single entity in Ireland that can help to restore terrestrial ecosystem functioning in this way. This is an immense opportunity that we're sure would be strongly supported by the Irish people (who are, after all, the owners of the company).

We would like to see Coillte expand its estate through land acquisitions. Strategically buying land for biodiversity, would mean expanding land plots already owned by the company, or creating ecological corridors to link important biodiversity areas together. The global community is likely to agree to a target to protect 30% of land by 2030 (many countries have already signed up to this, including the European Union). Ireland has yet to commit but we hope it will. The European Commission also recently published its long-awaited Nature Restoration Law. The state in general, but especially state bodies such as Coillte, need to be proactive in helping to achieve these targets. The benefits go beyond your land holding - private landowners are currently wary of nature conservation goals and so state-leadership will be essential in reversing this attitude.

A particular problem area is commonages, which are difficult to manage and tend to be in very poor ecological condition. Coillte should seek to buy out commonages with the intention of rewilding them. They should be designated as Nature Reserves but specific management structures should be put in place so they are managed by local communities.

Forests for wood

How important are Ireland's forests for producing wood products and supporting the construction of sustainable homes?

Neutral

How important are the following statements to you?

Importing timber and independently certified forests - Ireland should be self-sufficient for its timber requirements rather than importing timber from unsustainable sources.:

Neutral

Importing timber and independently certified forests - Wood should come from independently certified forests that ensure those forests are managed sustainably.:

Neutral

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement below?

Neutral

Please provide further detail to your response to the question above if required.:

Current certification schemes for commercial timber cannot be relied upon to ensure 'sustainability'. They are seen as mostly greenwashing. Trees planted in the coming years will not be suitable for harvesting for many decades and we do not have this time to deal with the climate and biodiversity emergency. We must take drastic action now. We need to see a radical shift in how commercial trees are established and managed. It is imperative that

Coillte moves away from the model of short-rotation conifers which are destined to be clear-felled and towards a model that protects soil, water and nature on 100% of its estate.

Do you believe we should build more timber frame houses* in Ireland, rather than using concrete or steel?

Don't know

How important is it that Coillte innovates and promotes wood products to support the bioeconomy and de-carbonise our built environment?

Neutral

Have you any additional comments to add on our Forests for Wood ambitions?

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Forests for people

In your opinion, how important are the following:

Physical activity and mental health/wellbeing - Forests for providing outdoor physical activity spaces for people?:

Very important

Physical activity and mental health/wellbeing - Forests for providing mental health and wellbeing spaces for people?:

Very important

How strongly do you agree or disagree with Coillte's ambition to double our number of recreation sites to 500?

Agree

Please provide further detail to your response to the question above if required.:

Irish people desperately need greater access to the outdoors and we encourage measures to improve infrastructure that allows accessibility as well as landscape restoration so that people can see, enjoy and learn about nature when they are outdoors. However, this comes with the proviso that access is not leading to unacceptable disturbance to biodiversity. The level of access and the type of infrastructure must be carefully considered at the site level. Many areas are not suited to large numbers of visitors while some areas should be retained with minimal, or no access at all.

Where do you think new recreational forests should be located?

Near population centres (cities, towns, and villages)

In your opinion, how important are the following in a recreational forest site:

recreational importance - matrix - Peace and quiet:

Very important

recreational importance - matrix - Exercise and activity facilities:

Important

recreational importance - matrix - Adventure experiences*:

Neutral

recreational importance - matrix - Parking:

Neutral

recreational importance - matrix - Map board and way marked trails:

Important

recreational importance - matrix - Welfare facilities**:

Neutral

recreational importance - matrix - Coffee facilities:

Neutral

recreational importance - matrix - Personal safety:

Neutral

recreational importance - matrix - Other:

if other please specify in the box below:

What role could communities play in recreational forest sites?

What role could communities play in recreational forests?:

We believe that local communities should be active participants on how forests are managed. This will include access and recreation but should also include monitoring and managing important areas for biodiversity.

Do you agree or disagree with Coillte's ambition to enable investment in world-class visitor destinations on the estate to support growth in tourism and recreation?

Disagree

Please provide further detail to your response to the question above if required.:

We don't need large, imposing 'destinations' that are just for attracting tourists. We need areas for peoples mental and physical well being.

How important are Coillte's forests for rural employment and economic activity?

Neutral

Have you any additional comments to add on our Forests for People ambitions?

Have you any additional comments to add on our Forests for People ambitions?:

Balancing the Multiple Objectives

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

Balance and trade offs - how strongly do you agree? - It is important that Coillte's forest estate balances the benefits for Climate, Nature, Wood and People.:

Strongly agree

Balance and trade offs - how strongly do you agree? - Coillte's ambitions for Climate, Nature, Wood and People are appropriately balanced.:

Disagree

Please provide further detail to your response to the questions above if required.:

The term 'balance' in this context has usually meant 'economic expansion' vs 'nature', and nature has always lost out. It is better to see the need for the economy to be nested within society, which in turn is nested within the environment. Therefore, you do not 'balance' the need of people vs nature or the economy, rather you see a healthy environment as the foundation for a healthy society, which in turn supports a healthy economy.

There is no evidence that Coillte's strategy is prepared for the radical transformation that is needed. While we welcome an increased emphasis on nature and the commitment to once again expand Ireland's forests, it still seems that these goals are peripheral rather than fundamental to the future of the company. We need to see greater ambition in the targets which have already been set, but we also need to see a commitment to move away from the disastrous model that has marked Coillte's development to-date. This means an end to monocultures and an end to clear-felling.

In the short, medium and long-term, dealing with the climate and biodiversity crisis is more important than producing a supply of commercial timber.

How important are the following in relation to where Coillte can have a significant long-term sustainability impact?

Coillte sustainability impact - matrix - Supplying certified wood and wood products:

Neutral

Coillte sustainability impact - matrix - Increasing the demand and use of wood products:

Neutral

Coillte sustainability impact - matrix - Enhancing and restoring biodiversity to provide valuable habitats for nature:

Very important

Coillte sustainability impact - matrix - Providing access to recreation amenities to improve health and wellbeing:

Important

Coillte sustainability impact - matrix - Producing renewable energy to combat climate change:

Unimportant

Coillte sustainability impact - matrix - Building resilience into our forests to help mitigate negative impacts of climate change:

Very important

Coillte sustainability impact - matrix - Growing and managing our forests to increase carbon storage:

Very important

Coillte sustainability impact - matrix - Working with local communities to improve connection with our forests and to support local employment:

Important

Are there any other areas of sustainable development where Coillte could make a real positive impact?

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