



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Project Woodland

Project Board

Interim Report #2

October 2021

Introduction

The Project Board is pleased to present its second Interim Report regarding the implementation of Project Woodland. This report deals specifically with recommendations submitted by the four working groups. In future reports, the Board intends to also highlight progress against each of the recommendations in the MacKinnon and O'Hara reports.

The purpose of this and future Interim Reports is to give feedback from the Board across the whole scope of Project Woodland, to keep Working Groups and all stakeholders apprised of developments, and to inform and make recommendations to the Minister on next steps. Transparency and openness are the hallmark of this process. The Project Board recognises the feedback received on its previous report. During October, the Board has met with each of the Working Groups which it has found extremely useful in progressing many of the issues outlined below.

The Board, Working Group chairs and DAFM leads met with Minister of State Hackett on October 21st to brief her on Project Woodland and progress towards its objectives.

Notable achievements

There has been notable progress on the implementation of Project Woodland since our first Interim Report in July including:

1. The process to appoint a new Director for Forestry in DAFM is now finalised with the appointment of Barry Delany.
2. The tender process for a regulatory review of Forestry as envisaged by Recommendations 6,7,22,23 O'Hara Report **has been completed and contracts signed on Friday October 29th**. This tender resulted from specific recommendations by Working Group 4 and supplemented by Working Group 1's recommendations on ecological assessment and single consents for thinning and forest roads. The tender was assessed by an evaluation committee formed of members of the Project Board with Working Group Chairs and DAFM. A Consultant group, led by Philip Lee has been appointed, comprising expert legal team, supported by specialists in key

environmental disciplines, forestry and organisation effectiveness. The final report from the consultants is expected **early February 2022**.

3. The proposal to initiate a process of pre-application discussions by registered foresters with DAFM expertise is well advanced. Following engagement with WG 4, the Project Board requested the Department to amend its proposal for a pilot of pre-application discussions. The Board believes that this proposal is now closely aligned to the recommendations from the WG. WG 4 is currently considering the issues and is scheduled to discuss this version of the proposal on **November 4th**. Subject to a positive outcome to that discussion, the intention is for DAFM to commence a **pilot scheme by end-November**.
4. The proposal for a new environmental planning grant [Recommendation 4 O'Hara Report] is also substantially progressed. The Project Board requested the Department to amend its initial proposal in light of comments from WG 4. WG 4 intends to respond to that proposal after its **November 4th** meeting. DAFM need a lead time of **5-6 weeks** to implement necessary iFORIS system changes following a decision to proceed.
5. There has been substantial progress on the strategic vision and objectives developed by WG 2 and the Project Board approved a series of public engagement processes for which procurement processes have commenced [Recommendation 12 O'Hara Report] including a public attitudes survey and a public consultation. The next steps planned are as follows:

Action	Indicative timescale
Engagement with FGP on principles, scenarios, shared vision and strategy	On-going
Survey of public attitudes to trees, woods and forests	Survey planned for November 2021
DAFM-led bilateral meetings & coalition building with key stakeholders, other Departments and Agencies and the EU	Nov 2021- April 2022
National survey of general public and public forum	Currently out to tender
Youth Engagement	January 2022
Community focus groups – in partnership with Irish rural link – commenced	October / Nov 2021

6. The Project Board is working with WG 3 to finalise tenders for carrying out a focused Training Needs analysis. DAFM has agreed to fund external consultants to undertake this work. WG 3 will revert with a revised proposal in light of PB comments by **November 5th**. Work is also well advanced on a draft Customer Charter capable of being adopted by DAFM but it is recognised that the final proposal needs to await the outcome of the regulatory and process reviews. The WG is asked to identify 4/5 priority KPI's that could be part of an interim charter that might apply immediately [Recommendations 11, 19 O'Hara Report].

Licence outputs

Building on the recommendations of WG 1 and with the deployment of additional resourcing within the licencing team, a significant improvement in licencing output is being achieved. The introduction of SI 293 by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in July 2021, required the introduction of a second 30-day period of public consultation in the licencing system. This adversely affected the output of licencing in both July and August. However, since that time DAFM has issued an average of 115 new licences each week which has resulted in a net reduction of 514 files in applications on hand with the department for processing. This net reduction has been primarily achieved through increased output on felling licences. As of **October 23rd**, there are 5,500 licences on hand for processing. Of these, just under 2,000 are Coillte applications and a further 700 have been referred back to the applicant for further work. Clearly there is good progress here, but more and sustained progress is needed – particularly with regards to afforestation. The Board is monitoring the outputs closely and, while welcoming the trend, emphasises that sustained and continued progress is needed. The Board also recommends that urgent prioritisation is now focused on afforestation. It intends to discuss DAFM's plan for this with them in more detail at an upcoming meeting of the Working Group.

Level of commitment by Working Groups

The Board acknowledges the very substantial depth and breadth of work since project inception. Working Group 1 has met 19 times; Working Group 2 has met 11 times; Working Group 3 has met 9 times with sub-committees meeting 5 times; Working Group 4 has met 12

times. We acknowledge the detailed contribution of all stakeholders to this process and are greatly encouraged by their commitment.

Acknowledgement of DAFM staff

We also want to acknowledge the enormous and ongoing commitment of DAFM staff working on forestry policy and operations around Ireland and recognise that their contribution to Project Woodland reforms comes in addition to their regular workload. We recognise that none of the changes that are needed will be achieved without the dedication and diligence of the staff having to implement new or different procedures.

Communications

We recognise the need for clearer communication with the Working Groups, stakeholder organisations (including the wider public) and with the Forest Policy Group. To address the first of these groups, the Board has met with each of the four Working Groups and has engaged in more detailed discussions with each Working Group Chair as papers and recommendations have been submitted. This is intended to align objectives and ensure that all stakeholders can make their views known in open discussion. We intend that such bilateral meetings will also be a feature of our future work. We will consider how we address the wider communications concerns in future discussions.

Next Interim Report

This current Interim Report shows progress and activities for Working Group submissions and recommendations to date. The Board intends to produce its third bi-monthly Interim Report by **December 17th** which will additionally report progress against all O'Hara recommendations.

Key achievements since Interim Report #1 (July 2021).

Workgroup Recommendations:

The following table summarises the present status of all recommendations received from Project Woodland working groups.

Working Group 1 – Proposals to deal with backlog of files			
Recommendation & O'Hara Ref.	PB Recommendations from July interim Report	Target Date	October Status/Progress
WG1/01 Definition of Backlog O'Hara 2	Board recommends that the Working Group considers refining the definition in light of the pattern and nature of Coillte applications whether by number of licences or volume.		The WG has approved the format of a monthly update for files on hand for processing by DAFM. This will be prepared each month by DAFM and circulated to the WGs and the FPG. Applications are submitted in batch by Coillte for future processing. The volume of such files will be highlighted.
WG1/02 Files started but not submitted by the applicant should be removed from the definition of applications on hand O'Hara 2	Board recommends that DAFM establishes a timetable to identify these files, and that it should revert to the Project Board by end-September with a programme of action and the proposed timetable. The work of the Business Analyst on process review will generate process maps for all licencing process and sub-processes	31-Oct	<u>Achieved ahead of target date</u> All applications were subject to examination as to completeness for further processing. Those who have submitted incomplete applications were given written notice. Following expiry of that notice, incomplete applications were marked 'withdrawn not submitted'. In future they will be retained on the system as 'non-valid' files and may be reported separately, if required.

<p>WG1/03 Dedicated Team on Backlog Response</p> <p>O'Hara 2</p>	<p>Working Group to report to the Project Board on the outcome of its enquiries with other agencies.</p> <p>DAFM to report to the Project Board by date of next Board Meeting in September on the implementation of the streamlining with clearly defined metrics for the impact this will have on the backlog.</p> <p>DAFM through its systems analyst to finalise baseline licencing figures for work on hand by end-September.</p> <p>The triage team which DAFM has deployed to felling licences should be immediately used to similar effect on backlogged roads and afforestation licences and a report supplied to the Project Board by end-September.</p>		<p>DAFM presented to the PB on its new processes for streamlining applications. This led to a full triage exercise for all licences on hand to determine which ones are suitable for processing and which require further work by the applicant. This has worked well for felling and road files but afforestation being more complex is not as well advanced. A dedicated team is now in place to advance ecological assessment of afforestation files.</p> <p>A team has been dedicated to pre-screening files to ensure ecological information is provided before being examined by ecologists. This process was implemented to streamline the ecology assessment process. Triage teams (inspectors) have completed felling, roads and afforestation.</p> <p>DAFM now produces (based on WG1's work from a baseline) a comprehensive monthly statistical performance dashboard (see WG1/06)</p>
<p>WG1/04 15km AA Screening within 4 weeks of PB accepting recommendation and</p> <p>Review of requirement for legal consent for thinning and forest roads.</p>	<p>An external regulatory review is being commissioned as referred to above which will incorporate this question.</p>	<p>October 2021 to early February 2022</p>	<p>Tender complete and the preferred bidder selected. Contract to be signed in next week.</p> <p>The external review is due to commence during October and report finally in February 2022.</p> <p>The consultants will meet, inter alia, with DAFM, the Board and the Working Groups as well as undertaking a comparative</p>

O'Hara 2			<p>analysis of the regulatory system in other selected EU countries.</p> <p>As requested by WG 1 it will include a specific analysis on both the 15km AA screening and the review of requirement for legal consent for thinning and forest roads.</p>
WG1/05 Review of Existing System for Ecological Assessment refinement	<p>Given that this is such a key and time-consuming part of the licencing process, the Project Systems Analyst should continue to assess how the process can be streamlined, without compromising its integrity.</p> <p>DAFM should apply the process streamlining currently applicable to some licences across the Board. It should revert to the Project Board with a timetable for this.</p> <p>DAFM should provide a report to the Project Board on process improvements by the end of August, and should establish indicative output targets, recognising that each application is different and requires assessment on its own merits. The 2 reviews (process and external regulatory) should also consider how this process can be managed most effectively, having due regard to the legal and regulatory framework; All Working Groups will be tasked to provide inputs on Terms of Reference</p>	Jan 31, 2022	<p>This element of Project Woodland relates to the review of the systems employed by DAFM in processing and assessing files. The work is ongoing by the Systems Analyst who is targeting her interim report to be completed by end-October.</p> <p>There is a linkage between the external regulatory review and the systems review. Completion and consideration of both will determine how efficiencies can be made in the overall licencing process and if systems need to be updated to streamline same. Target date February 2022 (to follow completion of external regulatory review)</p> <p>DAFM presented its strategy to the Board to improve the workflow in ecology using newly developed AA Assist processes and software.</p>
O'Hara 2			

WG1/06 Monthly dashboard on applications received O'Hara 2	DAFM to finalise the monthly dashboard for publication and circulation to all stakeholders by end-August. The format of the spreadsheet is being discussed with by WG1. The data presented needs to be clarified to ensure it is accurate and outlines the situation clearly & fairly.	Oct 2021	Format of monthly Dashboard was agreed with WG 1 and accepted by the Project Board DAFM will publish monthly to FPG starting with the November 18TH FPG meeting.
WG1/07 IFORIS Re-write: Agree Timing O'Hara 2	The Board requests a report from the systems analyst and DAFM on the current state of iForis and recommendations for the extent and timing of future work. Report to be delivered by end–October.	Nov 30th	The systems analyst will be delivering an interim report by end-October. A full report is expected to be completed during November .

WG 2 – Future Vision for Irish Forestry including new National Forest Strategy

Recommendation O'Hara Ref.	PB Recommendations from July interim Report	Target Date	October Status/Progress
WG2/01 The WG recommended a plan for co-creation to development of a new National Vision by end-2021 and new National Forestry Strategy by May 2022 O'Hara 16,21,1,8,12,13,14,17,18	Minister has agreed the key elements of public and engagement process DAFM team assigned to Phase 3 of Forest National Strategy	See Status/Progress	The Project Board has acknowledged substantial progress on the strategic vision and objectives developed by WG2 and has approved a series of public engagements for which procurement processes have commenced. These engagement processes are set out below in more detail.
WG2/01 Continued	Public attitudes survey	Nov 20th to Dec 15th	DAFM is preparing a public attitudes survey of 1,000 people which will be carried out by an independent polling company in the last week of November.
WG2/01 Continued	Youth Engagements	Jan 30th 2022	DAFM is engaging with Foróige, the leading youth development organisation, as part of the public consultation process for the development of a Forest Strategy for Ireland. Seeking the views of young people will be important in developing a shared vision. This engagement is expected in January 2022.

WG2/01 Continued	Tender for SEA/AA	Nov 10th	A tender to conduct the SEA and AA for the Forest Strategy and the next Forestry Programme was published on etenders and successfully closed on October 22nd . Over the coming fortnight an evaluation committee will analyse the bids.
WG2/01 Continued	Tender for Deliberative Dialogue	Oct 31st	A tender for carrying out a deliberative dialogue and public consultation is being prepared. Expected to publish on etenders by October 31st .
WG2/01 Continued	Update paper on Objectives, Values and Vision	Oct 31st	Papers circulated to the members of the Working Group. The Paper was also sent to both the Project Board and the FPG for Information and observations. All feedback currently being considered by WG 2
WG2/01 Continued	Paper on forming a strategy, guidelines and principles	Nov 15th	A draft paper is being prepared by Working Group 2 for Group discussion regarding the formation of a Strategy. This paper will form the basis for subsequent engagements with PB and FPG.

WG 3 - Organisational Review			
Recommendation & O'Hara Ref.	PB Recommendations from July interim Report	Target Date	October Status/Progress
<p>WG3/01 Development of a new Customer Charter</p> <p>O'Hara 11</p>	<p>WG to present to draft Charter to the PB once it is clear what efficiencies may be introduced on foot of the work of WG 1 and WG 4</p>	<p>Awaiting outcome of reg review</p>	<p>WG 3 has presented on its draft Charter to the PB. Project Board has provided feedback and has in particular asked the WG to identify a reduced number of key metrics, perhaps 5, that would best inform all Stakeholders of the performance of the licensing function in a transparent and useful way.</p> <p>The PB has also suggested that it may only be possible to finalise the charter when the regulatory review is complete, and revised processes are adopted.</p>
<p>WG3/02 Organisational Development Review</p>	<p>The Project Board notes that WG 3 is continuing to discuss this element of its work programme.</p> <p>DAFM should commission an external reviewer by Dec 31st, to report by end-April 2022, to have regard to the report of the Working Group and the organisational response to the business analyst output</p>	<p>TBC</p>	<p>Proposal submitted to PB.</p> <p>DAFM will invite expressions of interest from appropriate external consultants to commence review.</p> <p>At the recent bilateral meeting (PB/WG3) it was suggested by the Board there were elements of an organisational review that could only be concluded when the regulatory review was concluded.</p> <p>Bearing that in mind and in order to commence the exercise, the initial focus should address organisational culture and values,</p>

			<p>with DAFM staff engagement central to that exercise.</p> <p>The Project Board will be the Steering Group for the review and will revert to the Working Group Chair on governance.</p>
<p>WG3/03 Training needs analysis (TNA)</p> <p>O'Hara 19</p>	<p>WG 3 has set up a sub-group specifically to examine this issue and to make recommendations for training provision for stakeholders within sector and to present its findings by end Q4, having regard to the report of the Working Group and the organisational response to the business analyst output.</p>	<p>Nov 5th</p>	<p>A Teagasc forestry specialist has been appointed to chair sub-group on TNA. The sub-group produced a TNA document which was considered by the Project Board. There was general agreement by the Board to proceed immediately with the TNA, provided that the scope and priority targets be re-considered, particularly focussing on professionals in the sector. Jo O'Hara, representing the Board, will discuss further with the chair of the sub-group the details of what the change in scope and focus means.</p> <p>WG 3 will revert with revised proposals as to scope in light of PB comments by November 5th, 2021 and tender to issue immediately thereafter.</p>
<p>WG3/04 Communications</p>	<p>Minister has finalised successful applicants calls for promotion and announced €1.4m in funding</p>		<p>Announced during July 2021</p>
<p>WG3/04 contd. Communications</p>	<p>DAFM is working to engage a communications specialist to support Project Woodland, and in particular the communication of a</p>		<p>The Head of Communications for DAFM, Meg Laffan, is chairing a subgroup which is developing a Communications Strategy.</p>

	vision for the sector, by end-Q3.		
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WG 4 – Process Review			
Recommendation & O'Hara Ref.	PB Recommendations from July interim Report	Target Date	October Status/Progress
WG4/01 Environmental Report and Associated Grant O'Hara 4	DAFM will complete a legal analysis of the proposal to be completed by end-October. DAFM to consider opportunities to simplify the report and grant structure.	Dec 7th	Paper prepared by DAFM, approved by Board and submitted to WG4 for consideration at their next meeting on November 4th . Modifications to IFORIS will take 5-6 weeks following decision and instructions to proceed.
WG4/02 End to end Legal Review	TBC commissioning such a review. Clear Terms of Reference will be agreed by the Board	Delivery early February 2022	Tender completed. Winning bidder selected. Contract was signed on October 29th and work will commence within one week . Initial meetings to be scheduled with Board, DAFM and WGs and report due back by early February 2022 .
WG4/03 End to End Process Review O'Hara 22	Included within the scope of the external regulatory review - 'As-is' review	Oct 31st	Business Analyst is preparing an Interim Report for submission to the Board in the first instance and then provided to the Working Group. She is commencing study of Forestry licencing computer systems.
WG4/04 Pre-Applications Discussions	The Board recommends that the Working Group should consider how examples of best practice within other regulatory bodies in Ireland or in other jurisdictions deliver this, with a view to preparing a report for the Project Board by Year end	Dec 17th	Proposals to PB and DAFM have approved paper and sent to WG4 to evaluate. WG4 due to revert to Board after their November 4th meeting. DAFM proposes a pilot (in one DAFM region, for 3 months). to be rolled out 5-6 weeks following agreement to proceed. This will

O'Hara 3	<p>following the External Regulatory and Process Reviews</p> <p>DAFM intends to develop a draft framework for developing a system by Q2 2022. This should include consideration of options for use of Teagasc advisory services, for example</p>		<p>be followed by a review. The intent would be for a national rollout early in 2022.</p>
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