

Speech by Commissioner Phil Hogan at Coillte Conference on Climate Change and Forestry

- Dublin, Friday 26th January 2016

– Check Against Delivery –

(Introduction)

- Thank you very much for your introduction Fergal. You've given a very neat overview of the stakes in this important discussion.
- Ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to be here with you this morning. It's no exaggeration to say that this is an event of true national significance.
- I was heartened to observe that strategies to combat climate change and the role forestry can play did feature in Tuesday's televised party leaders debate.

- This is as it should be, because a forward-thinking and prudent approach to forestry can serve this country very well now, and in the future.
- Coillte has served this country with distinction since its foundation, and the organisation is very much in tune with the central role forest strategies are playing in shared climate action. 15% of your estate, representing some 88,000 hectares, is managed with biodiversity as the primary objective.
- **And I know you are examining ways to build on this, which is why this conference is so timely.** As Fergal explained, Coillte is among the leading forestry and land solutions companies in Europe, managing 7% of the country's land and operating three very successful businesses.
- You are quite right to point out that these have a vital role to play in the climate change agenda. Today's discussion is all about how this can best be achieved.
- I will be brief in my remarks this morning, and my colleague Dermot Ryan will this afternoon outline in greater detail the European perspective on climate change and the role of forestry.

- Generally speaking, I can tell you that coming to grips with the forestry brief has been one of the real eye-openers since I was appointed Commissioner.
- In Ireland, we are perhaps less aware than in other EU Member States of the value that European society attributes to forests. Wooded areas represent one of the EU's most important land uses, covering about 40% of the EU total area – and they have been expanding steadily.
- **It's also important to recall that 2015 was an important year for forests.** The Seventh Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe took place in Madrid, and the Global COP21 Gathering in Paris highlighted the importance of forests to a huge worldwide audience.
- At European level, we took the crucial step of **delivering the EU Forest Strategy** - providing guidance, direction and a blueprint for truly joined-up thinking in relation to this important sector.
- As you know, there is a pressing need to ensure the long term sustainable management and development of forests, balancing the economic, social and environmental benefits they deliver.

- The new EU Forest Strategy aims to establish the right framework to achieve this. It seeks to promote the sector's ability to create innovation, growth and jobs while ensuring sustainable forest management. It therefore addresses many of the issues that will be discussed here today.
- From an economic point of view, forestry is one of the main sectors that keep our rural areas vibrant and sustainable. Forest-based industries provide nearly three and a half million jobs in the EU and produce a total added value of 135 billion EUR a year. **The Irish share of this figure is naturally quite small, but the potential for growth is clear.**
- And of course, forestry represents a key sector in the transition towards a low-carbon and climate friendly economy. This is the primary purpose of today's discussion, and I look forward to hearing the outcomes of this conference. The Commission stands ready to assist in any way we can.
- It is critical that sustainable forestry strategies are developed hand in hand with sustainable food security solutions. This is as true for the rest of Europe as it is for Ireland.

- This country's potential for job creation and economic growth in the agri-food sector means that a smart climate strategy, and a central role for forestry, is essential. And the momentum is already there: the total forest area in Ireland is growing faster than any other EU country.
- The challenge, therefore, is to maintain this momentum and keep building on it.
- Let me outline some of the work happening at EU level that may be relevant to you.
- **The key buzzword at the moment is one of our rather unfortunate EU acronyms: LULUCF.** As most of you know, this means "land-use, land-use change and forestry".
- This policy has a growing relevance to the 2030 EU Climate and Energy Strategy.
- Currently, in the EU, the amount of carbon stored annually by the LULUCF sector represents 9 – 10 % of EU annual Green House Gas emissions.

- Work on LULUCF is also addressed in the EU Forest Strategy, and in the recently adopted Forest MAP (or Multi-annual Implementation Plan), which has climate change as one of its priorities.
- The Commission is currently assessing how to deal with Agriculture and LULUCF in our climate policy up to 2030. A policy proposal will be presented in 2016, based on a solid impact assessment of the different options and the outcomes from the COP21 in Paris.
- I would urge you all to keep a close eye on these developments and analyse how they may be of benefit in your work. I expect they will be of particular value in developing actual quantification mechanisms of the cost effective carbon mitigation potential in agriculture and LULUCF.
- The EU supports the sector in a number of other ways:
- Through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development - around 7.2 billion EUR of public expenditure is programmed for forestry measures in the 2014-2020 period;
- Through research and innovation funding;

- And through our strategies for the European Bio-economy, which we are developing in greater detail at present.
- The demand for forest biomass is likely to continue to increase, in line with the worldwide demand from traditional industries and from the promising development of the bioeconomy.
- Use of wood as sustainable and renewable raw material can contribute to decarbonise our economy by substituting for energy intensive materials and also enhance a more resilient energy union.
- These new markets provide job and income opportunities for forest owners and related sectors.
- In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, there is a strong and growing awareness at European level of the central role forestry strategies will play in climate action.
- It is absolutely essential that this awareness is also promoted at national, regional and local level. The potential to do much more is undeniable, particularly here in Ireland.

- As Fergal pointed out, the output from Irish forests is predicted to double by 2028. The challenge, now, is to harness that momentum and use it to do even greater things.
- From my point of view, I am happy to pledge the support of the European Commission in any way we can. Progress in this area represents a win-win situation for our climate and our economy.
- Thank you again for inviting me here today, and I look forward to hearing the outcomes of your conference.