

Coillte concerns about conditionality of felling licences

DAFM have just concluded a consultation process with the FII in relation to standard conditions for felling licences. While DAFM were able to address some of the issues raised, others are still with DAFM for further consideration. Once this process is completed DAFM intend to undertake a full stakeholder consultation on these standard conditions

Outstanding issues are as follows;

Setbacks from water bodies reducing the productive forest area

Depending on the number of water bodies within a project area, the amount of productive area can be reduced significantly as a result of water setbacks. Setback distances currently being included in licences can range from 10m to 25m on either side of the water body depending on slope and soil type. These setbacks are based on the findings from the HydroFOR project (2016). A review of setbacks for felling is currently underway and is due to conclude shortly.

Conditions linked to protecting the badger habitat

Where an active badger set is located within a project area, licences include the following conditions;

- A 50m exclusion zone must be established around the sett where trees can only be felled manually.
- All works must be confined to daylight hours and no artificial lighting is to be used on site.

Coillte maintain that felling trees manually is not a realistic option as chainsaw operators are not readily available; the health and safety aspects of using chainsaws when harvesters are available as a safer option is also raised. To leave the trees behind will only lead to windblow, which will damage badger setts.

The second of these conditions in relation to restricting artificial light is also contested by Coillte. Operators need to work at night, machines need to use orange lights and beacons for health and safety purposes. DAFM are using the badger conditions used by the National Roads Authority.

A DAFM ecologist is currently reviewing alternative options in relation to both these conditions.

Hen Harrier

DAFM are currently implementing the hen harrier protocol set out in the '*Hen Harrier Conservation and the Forestry Sector in Ireland*' document as agreed with the NPWS. This involves the use of '*Red Areas*' to delineate '*High Likelihood of Nesting Areas*'. Project areas falling within these zones are subject to a timing restriction where harvesting operations cannot take place between the 1st March and the 15th August. DAFM do not support giving these data to forestry companies\forest owners as the data is highly sensitive and access needs to be restricted to protect the hen harrier. Coillte feel that the current DAFM approach is too broad and should be limited to actual areas where breeding pairs have been sighted. DAFM disagree. Coillte want to establish a '*Forest Birds Working Group*' to develop improvements to the current procedures for hen harrier and merlin. DAFM support the establishment of a

‘Felling Technical Working Group’ which will have a wider remit but which can include these issues.

Setbacks when using pesticides

Felling licences currently include a condition whereby manual top up applications of pesticide for the control of weevil cannot be done within 50m of an aquatic zone. Coillte contend that this setback was more appropriate to cypermethrin, however cypermethrin is no longer being used in Ireland and has been replaced with acetamiprid. DAFM ecologists are currently reviewing these conditions.