



**IFA response to
DAFM revised response to approach and supports for plantations impacted by
Ash Dieback disease**

17th January 2020

Introduction

IFA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the revised DAFM approach to and supports for plantations impacted by Ash Dieback disease.

The proposed supports outlined in the document are wholly inadequate to compensation forest owners for the financial loss incurred by the disease. Ash dieback has had a devastating consequence to the survival, growth and wood quality of ash trees, and therefore has had a devastating consequence on the commercial value of the timber crop.

Farmers were encouraged and supported to plant ash by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine through higher grants and premiums. Farmers feel aggrieved that while being incentivised to grow ash, the Department did not have adequate controls in place to stop the importation of infected plants and as a result their investment was put at risk.

The handling by the Department of the Ash Dieback disease outbreak, particularly the level of support offered to forest owners and communication with forest owners affected by the disease, has been totally insufficient. This has added hugely to distress and frustration felt by the forest owners affected by the disease.

Proposed Support Schemes

IFA cannot support the proposed level of supports outlined in the document, as it does not appropriately compensate farmers for the financial loss incurred by the disease.

The proposals to support, which are based on age, height or the extent of the disease in the plantation are totally unacceptable. Particularly in light of the ongoing delays developing this scheme, which mean that many plantations will no longer qualify for any support under the proposals.

The management of ash dieback is very challenging. There is no scientific evidence that thinning infected plantations is beneficial in the long-term when ash dieback is present. Where dieback is severe, research suggests that the best approach is to harvest remaining commercial timber before value depreciation and to replant the area with other tree species.

IFA proposes the following measures are introduced to ensure that farmers affected by the disease are appropriately supported to manage infected plantations:

- All infected plantations (both grant aided and non-grant aided) must be eligible for a 100% reconstitution grant to support forest owners to clearfell and replant with tree species that satisfy their management objectives.
- Forest premiums must be paid on replanted land for 15 years according to GPC rates established.
- The option not to replant, without penalties, must also be available under certain circumstances.

Conclusion

It is clear that the Department developed the proposed support schemes without meaningful consideration of the submissions to the initial consultation in May 2018. It is IFA's position that the supports proposed do not recognise the financial losses incurred by forest owners and must be significantly improved to support owners to reconstitute infected plantations or not to replant under certain circumstances.

The treatment of forest owners affected by the disease has hugely damaged farmer's confidence in wider the afforestation programme. If the Government is committed to the achieving the afforestation

programme set out in the Climate Action Plan and restore confidence in forestry as a land use option, they must introduce the proper level of support for forest owners affected by the Ash Dieback disease.