

**Press Release from Just Forests
and the Irish Natural Forestry Foundation**
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Coillte risk losing prestigious 'eco label'

Coillte "restructuring" seen as smokescreen for sell-off of crucial State assets

Just Forests and the Irish Natural Forestry Foundation (INFF) have been reliably informed that Coillte have identified the loss of FSC certification as a tangible live threat to the company. This will threaten jobs throughout the sector. The response to this threat has been twofold and is preposterous.

1. Go for a weaker certification standard to replace FSC
2. Accept loss of FSC in some areas and try to keep it for other areas.

Coillte - Irish State Forestry Company - have restructured and are dividing the country's forest estate into 8 individual units. These are to be called Business Administration Units (BAU). Each BAU will operate independently when it comes to FSC certification. Coillte have acknowledged they risk losing their FSC certification and have taken steps to address that risk.

However, instead of deciding to increase the compliance level with FSC certification, the company have decided to apply for certification with the weaker industry-led PEFC standard. PEFC Ireland does not have the support of environmental and community groups to the same extent that FSC has in Ireland. Coillte have also decided that carving up the states forests and applying for certification in each individual unit is the most appropriate way of dealing with the risk.

"This means that timber grown and harvested in Kerry may be internationally recognised as unsustainable and lack the FSC eco label, while the same company can sell its timber from Cork as FSC certified. It makes a mockery of the whole process of trying to get timber that is sustainably produced into consumer's homes.", says Cillian Lohan of INFF, Cork based NGO.

"This has to be an awful blow to the State Forestry Company who have consistently fought off challenges to their FSC certification status", according to Tom Roche of Irish forest campaigning organisation Just Forests, based in Rhode, Co Offaly.

"Termination of the FSC certificate would have very serious implications for Coillte Panel Products Division which consists of SmartPly Europe Ltd, based in Waterford, which produces Oriented Strand Board (OSB) and for Medite Europe Ltd, based in Clonmel, which produces Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF). Both products have enjoyed considerable success on the export market scene in recent times because of their FSC certification status", according to Tom Roche, of Just Forests.

The process of restructuring their forest management units from 13 down to 8 is cited as a mechanism to attempt to fend off possible cessation of the FSC label.

However, this can also be seen as yet another step in the preparation for the sale of our state forests. Each of the 8 units (BAU's) can now be sold separately and minimise the protestations from the citizens of Ireland, as the whole of the state forests would not be sold in one chunk.

"We must remain very vigilant with this process and our government must keep its citizens informed. This a hard won democracy that we live under and the state assets that belong to the people of Ireland should not be sold off behind our backs," said Cillian Lohan.

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Notes to Editors

Coillte employs approx 1,100 people and was established in 1988. It owns over 445,000 hectares of land, about 7% of the land cover of Ireland.

Coillte first received the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) 'eco-label' back in May 2001. In 2011 they marked 10 years of FSC certification at a reception in the Croke Park Conference Centre. However, the often controversial forest owner has struggled to comply with the rigorous demands of the world's most credible and coveted forest certification label. Their current forest management and chain-of-custody certificate (FM/COC-000706) issued by Soil Association Woodmark, is not due to expire until May 2016. Over the years, controversy has surrounded and dogged the issuing of FSC certification to Coillte since day one.