

First FSC Draft on the way!

After months of meetings and discussions it appears that Irish forest stakeholders are serious about independent forest certification...Report by Tom Roche.

The Steering Committee of the 'Irish Forestry Certification Initiative' (IFCI), recently appointed Mr Tony Mannion, Dip. For. Sc., Dip. EIA (mgmt) MSIF, to commence work on drawing up the First Draft FSC Standard for Irish forests. Mr Mannion who is the current president of The Society of Irish Foresters (SIF) is a well-known professional forestry consultant and is based in Rosses Point, Sligo. At the same meeting on Friday 27th August in Tullamore, Just Forests were appointed as secretariat to the Initiative.

What is FSC?

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international, independent, non-governmental organisation founded in 1993. The goal of the FSC is to promote environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.

The FSC has ten Principles and 56 Criteria of Forest Management that cover such issues as environmental impact, land tenure and community benefits. In November of 1996, a seminar on forest/timber certification was organised by the Tullamore-based forest campaigning group Just Forests, in Dowdstown House, Navan. Over sixty people representing the commercial, social and environmental interests attended.

In December 1998, individuals in Ireland interested in FSC certification came together to start a process to further develop the FSC's Principles and Criteria for application in Ireland. On Friday 22 January 1999, a Steering Committee was elected and mandated to proceed with the development of an Irish Forestry Standard based on the FSC Principles & Criteria - a standard that could be independently certified by an accredited FSC certifier. The members of the Steering Committee represent the social, economic and environmental stakeholders in Irish forestry.

Compliance with IFCI Standard

In the absence of FSC approved standards, certification evaluations may occur under the FSC system by FSC accredited certifiers. The majority of certifications globally have taken place in just this situation. A company or landowner signs a contract with an FSC accredited certifier to do an evaluation. The certifiers are required to consider the FSC Principles and Criteria, the best available standards for the region, to consult with all stakeholders, and to take into consideration any information on the company, as well as comments on their evaluation system, to document how these are

taken into account and to rigorously assess the companies performance and forestry operations in the field. The FSC system allows this process to proceed at the same time as national/regional standards are being developed.

Any Irish forest owner that is certified prior to the completion of the 'Irish Forestry Certification Initiative's' (IFCI) standards has one year to comply with the national standards (the emerging IFCI standard) once the International FSC Board approves them.

Experience in other countries has shown that the process of developing regional/national standards is a significant undertaking. The situation in Ireland (with our plantation forestry programme) poses a number of particularly challenging issues, which the IFCI recognises and will work to address.

Interest by forest companies to pursue certification and increasing demand for certified products from value added manufacturers, retailers, and consumers in the last few months, provides an opportunity for promoting the FSC and certification in Ireland. FSC members, including environmental organisations, forest companies, individuals, and all stakeholder organisations, will work in cooperation with FSC accredited certifiers to ensure that certification assessments proceed in a constructive and as transparent a manner as possible over the coming months.

Consultation Process

The appointment of Mr Mannion is a giant step forward for the IFCI and firmly places the initiative on the right



National Steering Group and the Secretariat.

L-R: Mr. Brendan Kelly (Farmer - Social Chamber), Mr. Denis Heenan (Chairman Crann-Environmental Chamber), Mr. George McCarthy (Head of Planning at Coillte-Economic Chamber), Ms. Iva Pocock (VOICE-Voice of Irish Concern For the Environment-Environment Chamber), Mr. Donal Whelan (Technical Director, Irish Timber Growers Association-Small Forest Owners Chamber), Mr. Tony Mannion (Appointed Consultant. Tony represented the Society of Irish Foresters on the Social Chamber and has since been replaced by Mr. Sean McNamara from the Society), Standing: Mr. Donal Magner (Irish Timber Council-Economic Chamber), Mr. Tom Roche (Co-ordinator and FSC Contact Person in Ireland), Mr. Neil Foot (Logistics Manager, Louisiana Pacific Europe-Economic Chamber). Missing from the picture is Dr. Declan Little (Woodlands of Ireland-Social Chamber).