

Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr Brian Cowen T.D.
Speech at the launch of Just Forests' Good Wood Policy Guide
Wednesday 25th September 2002

(Royal Institute of the Architects in Ireland (RIAI), 8 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.)

I am very pleased to be here this evening at the launch of the Good Wood Policy Guide. The Guide will help promote a more responsible national approach to the use of timber and wood imported into Ireland by wood importers, architects, designers and consumers in the housing and interior decoration markets.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs I have responsibility with my colleague, the Minister of State, Tom Kitt, for the implementation of Ireland's development cooperation programme. Sustainable Development, commonly defined as "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,*" is fundamental to our development cooperation policy.

The Good Wood Policy Guide is an excellent example of how focussed national initiatives involving Government, consumers and producers can make a major contribution to the national and international pursuit of sustainable development.

At the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the international community adopted a concrete action plan aimed at implementing sustainable development policies across all relevant economic, social and environmental areas. The publication of the Guide, so soon after the Summit, sets an example for other sectors of the economy where our daily activities have an impact on sustainable development. The Guide clearly shows us how with some thought, imagination and commitment we can bring sustainable development down from the high-flown rhetoric of UN conferences to the reality of our everyday activities. The simple act of selecting wood for construction can have profound and far-reaching implications in countries where tropical woods are under threat.

The *Good Wood Guide* informs us that tropical wood to the value of €133 million annually are imported into Ireland. There is, at the same time, no evidence available to tell us whether this wood has been legally or illegally cut or whether the forests from which it originated were sustainably managed or not.

Despite the fact that we are a small country, the volume of tropical wood we import represents the equivalent of cutting down 30 acres of tropical forests *per day*

Tropical Forests play an environmental role of global importance and their destruction should be of immediate concern to all of us. They absorb vast amounts of carbon from the atmosphere thus reducing greenhouse gas levels. They are destined to play an important role under the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change.

Tropical forests also provide sustainable livelihoods to indigenous peoples who have lived in and managed their forests for countless generations. They provide the habitat for much of the world's biodiversity – animal insect and plant life. The latter is particularly important. As Professor Norman Myers points out in his article written specially for the guide, one in four of the drugs we buy across the counter of our local pharmacy, has its origins in tropical forest plants. The possibility of discovering cures for the diseases which scourge the world today - HIV/AIDS, cancer, Multiple Sclerosis, Alzheimer's - in such tropical forest plants, is very real.

What a shame if that possibility were lost to humanity through illegal and unsustainable logging of tropical timber - some of which goes to put doors and windows in our houses, make attractive shopfronts and furnish our bars.

The Good Wood Policy Guide suggests a practical but relatively simple solution to the threat facing the world's tropical forests - a solution driven by the purchasers rather than the suppliers of hardwoods. **Demand that the hardwoods you specify and purchase, are certified as coming from sustainably managed forests.** A simple idea but not so easy to carry out in an industry which spans the world and sources its timber from some of its remotest corners - a world where the quest for profit can lead to deception and misrepresentation.

Just Forests, an independent, non government organization with no axe to grind, no vested interest, since its foundation in 1989 has been following developments in the industry. The Good Wood Guide that we are launching here today recommends the certification provided by the Forestry Stewardship Council as meeting all the criteria of a reliable scheme. I support this recommendation and urge you when specifying or using this beautiful natural product, to ensure that you are contributing to the maintenance of the world's tropical forests rather than to their destruction.

We are the custodians of our forests and we have a moral responsibility to pass them on to future generations in a much improved and environmentally enhanced form. Naturally, the better our forests are managed here in Ireland and the more timber we produce, the less the demand for imports from the environmentally more sensitive and challenged regions of our world.

Sadly, we in Ireland for a combination of human settlement and historic reasons know only too well the phenomenon of deforestation as a result of which we are the least forested country in the European Union, despite a high level of tree planting. The Government's Forestry Service is tasked with the responsibility of developing our forestry stock to a scale and in a manner which maximises its contribution to national economic and social well being on a sustainable basis and which is compatible with the protection of the environment. As part of our strategy, we are accelerating our own rate of reforestation in Ireland to bring us from the very low base we have today of 9% of the total land area to the target of 17% by the year 2030.

As an Offaly man I am particularly proud that Offaly County Council is the first local authority in Ireland to have formally adopted a Timber Purchasing Policy that will use timber and wood products sourced by the Council and established as coming from well-managed sustainable sources. I echo the comments of the County Manager when he says that he believes that Offaly County Council are leading by example in the sustainable development of forests both at home and abroad. Clearly what happens at the local level can and does impact on the global level.

In conclusion, I'd like to say a particular word of thanks to Just Forests and all those who have worked to prepare this policy guide. Just Forests Chairperson, Mary Humphreys and Just Forests founder and director, Tom Roche can be justifiably proud of the role they have played in its publication but even more so because of the positive impact I believe it can and will have on developing a more responsible national approach to the use of timber and wood imported into Ireland



The Taoiseach, Mr. Brian Cowen, T.D., (as Minister for Foreign Affairs), launches Just Forests Good Wood Policy Guide in the offices of the Royal Institute of the Architects in Ireland (RIAI), Merrion Square, Dublin.
Others in the picture: L to R: Tom Roche, Founder/Coordinator Just Forests: Jack Keyes, County Manager, Monaghan Co Council,(former Director of Services Offaly Co Council): and Tom Arnold, Chief Executive, Concern Worldwide.