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JOINT FAO/ECE/ILO COMMITTEE ON FOREST TECHNOLOGY, MANAGEMENT AND TRAINING

Seminar on
AFFORESTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

in conjunction with the 24th session of the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on
Forest Technology, Management and Training

Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland, 15-19 September 2002

**The Role of Forest Research and Development in Supporting the Sustainable Management of
Plantation Forestry in Ireland**

Basic paper by Mr. Eugene Hendrick

Summary

Forest cover in the Republic of Ireland extends to some 660,000 ha, or almost 9.5% of the land surface. Plantations comprise by far the largest part of the forest area (more than 95%). These have been established over the past century, with the majority being planted in the past half decade. Forestry is therefore a relatively recent land-use in Ireland. Taken together with the fact that the estate is mostly based on exotic tree species, these factors present challenges and opportunities for the implementation of sustainable forest management (SFM) in plantation forestry in Ireland. Forest research has played – and continues to play – an important role in implementing SFM in afforestation programmes.

A key feature of the COFORD programme is the identification of priority areas for forest research and development, where expenditure can be targeted in order to meet the issues and problems facing the forestry sector. COFORD is addressing these priorities through co-funded R&D projects. In addition, there is a considerable body of knowledge and expertise available from previous COFORD programmes, other nationally funded research and research abroad. These are all brought to bear in addressing issues and problems in the afforestation programme.

Transferring research results into policy and practice is the great challenge for all R&D organisations, be they industry- or state-based. In Ireland, we are fortunate that the forestry community is relatively small and is increasingly more open to new ideas and change.

Practice and policy based on good science will pay dividends in the afforestation programme but a caveat must be entered here: policy should not be completely science-led. There are often large uncertainties associated with scientific estimates; frequently new results overturn the conventional (scientific) wisdom. Science alone should not be the determinant of changes in policy or practice. Wise policy-makers and practitioners will take other factors – including the uncertainty of scientific ‘facts’ – into account when making and taking decisions.
