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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

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**Irish Timber Growers Association – Representing and Supporting Woodland Owners through
Practical Initiatives**

Basic paper by Mr. Donal Whelan

Summary

The Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA) was established in 1977 to support and represent private woodland owners and to promote the development and expansion of private sector forestry in Ireland. The current membership of the Association includes small farm forest owners, forestry co-operative members, larger private woodland estates and forestry pension funds. This large membership and wide range of forest ownership ensure that the Association has a strong representative voice for members.

The total area under forest in Ireland currently amounts to approximately 665,000 hectares or over 9% of our total land area. The area of private woodlands amounts to approximately 270,000 hectares or 41% of the total forest area.

The development of the private forestry sector in Ireland over the past 13 years has been dramatic. Farmers and landowners have responded to the attractive grant and premium support from the EU as part

of the radical restructuring of the Common Agricultural Policy and the general downturn in the fortunes of the agricultural sector. In 2001, over 91% of afforestation by area was classified as farmer planting.

The average size of a privately owned forest in Ireland is less than 9 ha. This is not untypical of European forestry in general, where there are over 12 million private forest owners with an average forest holding of less than 5 ha. The challenges facing forest owners and Growers Associations are therefore similar in a number of respects throughout Europe. The Irish Timber Growers Association has looked at various organisational models of forest owner's associations in Europe and has adapted its structure to best meet the requirements and demands of Irish growers. The structure that the ITGA has adopted is focused on achieving the following aims, many of which are common to other European grower organizations, and perhaps to growers elsewhere in the world

Main aims of the Irish Timber Growers Association include the following.

- **To encourage and enable growers** to take an active interest in the management of their plantations, stressing the importance of growing quality timber.
- **To assist in providing structures which facilitate the group harvesting, marketing and haulage of roundwood** from private plantations. With small, fragmented holdings, small timber volumes in thinnings, often poor access and relatively long extraction distances, private forest owners must work together to improve their collective economies of scale.
- **To provide a strong representative voice** for growers in the development of future forestry strategy, regulation and legislation in both Ireland and the EU.

This paper will look at the many challenges facing Irish timber growers, which are similar to those of our European counterparts, and outline the structure that the Association had adopted to meet these challenges.
