

4,436 forestry licences still to be processed, committee told

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There are 4,436 forestry licences awaiting processing by Department of Agriculture officials, the Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture heard last Friday.

The Department's assistant secretary Colm Hayes told Michael Fitzmaurice TD: "There are 4,436 licences on hand in

the Department for processing, of which 2,705 are for felling, 691 are for roads and 1,040 are for afforestation."

He said he had set a figure of 4,500 licences for 2021.

Dissatisfaction

Regarding dissatisfaction with compensation for forest owners with ash dieback chief forestry inspector Seamus Dunne said there were "no plans to review the grant and

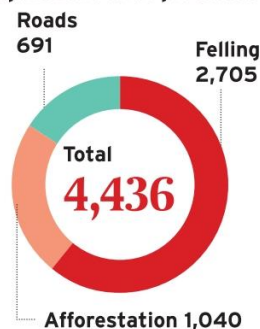
the scheme".

He told the committee there had been 250 applications under the scheme and "a few approvals" had been issued.

The Department's opening statement to committee chair Jackie Cahill outlined how Coillte now has 85% of its 2021 programme "already licensed with the final felling licences for the year to be processed over the next few weeks".

Members of the committee,

Licences with the Department to be processed



including Sinn Féin agriculture spokesman Matt Carthy, maintained a two-tier licensing system was favouring Coillte over the private sector.

Colm Hayes acknowledged that this was an issue but said: "It should not be turned into a Coillte versus private debate because whatever Coillte gets, services the private sector so it is all output."

Growing concern

Despite improvements in licences, all stakeholders contacted by the *Irish Farmers Journal* remain unconvinced that the Department can deliver adequate licences.

"Given the current licence backlog and expected increase in applications, there are mounting concerns that, even with added resources, the Department is not in

a position to fully address the current situation," said Paddy Bruton, Forestry Services Ltd.

Right strategy

Patrick Murray, sales director of Murray Timber Group, said the Department's approach to prioritise volume was "the right strategy at the time" but added: "They now need to get all licences - big and small - through

the system as quickly as possible."

John Roche of Arbor Forest Management welcomed "the commitment by the Forest Service to improve the output of private licences they have referred to ecology". However, he said the output was far too low and the sector needed a licensing system that was fit for purpose.

Donal Whelan of the ITGA

highlighted "the importance of progressing all forestry licence applications in chronological order so that applicants are not disadvantaged".

Outturn

The outturn for afforestation was heavily criticised by Teige Ryan, None so Hardy Nurseries. "The afforestation programme is being sacrificed as the De-

partment is prioritising felling licences over planting," he said. "The Department is fully aware that delays in issuing afforestation licences will result in poor conversion rates to planting."

Topics including afforestation, ash dieback, planting unenclosed land and the 15km Natura site threshold will be discussed in next week's *Irish Farmers Journal*.