



17<sup>th</sup> June, 2021

Circular 08/2021

To all Registered Foresters

**Re: Information Required for Forestry Licence Applications Completions**

The Department has recently reviewed its systems for the preparation of Appropriate Assessment Screening Determinations, Appropriate Assessment Reports and Appropriate Assessment Determinations. We have made some improvements to the system to optimise the time of the ecologists to concentrate on the ecology aspects of each application. Currently these improvements are only applied to private tree felling licence (TFL) applications with ecologists working mostly on these files in advance of the system being developed further to assist with forest road works and afforestation licence applications.

Some updates are outlined below:

**Tree Felling Licence Applications**

- Using the system improvements mentioned above the Department can now produce AARs more efficiently provided there is a good quality harvest plan in accordance with the *Standards for Felling and Reforestation* (DAFM, 2019).
- Therefore, in relation to tree felling licence applications, we are now asking that a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) should only be provided if specifically sought by the Department. Applications with NISs currently with the Department will continue to be prioritised.
- Analysis has shown that around half of the tree felling licence applications screened in for Appropriate Assessment are incomplete, with Harvest Plans and Maps either absent, not legible or missing essential information, (e.g. watercourse not marked, the position of temporary crossing points not marked, extraction route not marked, no indication regarding stacking areas, no Reforestation Plan included). These applications cannot be processed until such issues are addressed. The Appendix highlights common issues that arise with Harvest Plans, most of which are in relation to the protection of water.
- Ecologists are currently working on tree felling licence files, where the analysis indicates that the applications are complete.
- In relation to the incomplete applications, the Department will be communicating in the next few days with individual Forestry Companies and Registered Foresters regarding their applications to inform them of the issues involved. This will be by way of a list of all such applications, together with a very short narrative for each, outlining the issue(s) involved. **Companies are requested to send the missing or revised Harvest Plans and Maps or any other missing information as soon as possible to [felling.forests@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:felling.forests@agriculture.gov.ie).**

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### Forest Road Works Licence Applications

- As above, only submit a NIS for a forest road works licence application if specifically sought by the Department.
- Foresters are advised at this stage to review forest road works licence applications currently with Ecology, to ensure that the application includes a good quality biodiversity map, (as per Circular 18 of 2020), and a detailed road specification applicable to the site. Information must be provided on the crossing points of both relevant watercourses and aquatic zones. Also, if the construction involves any atypical element, (e.g. special construction works, use of culverts 600 mm or larger, steep slopes etc.), provide either an additional short description of that operation in question or a reference to the appropriate method being adopted in the COFORD *Forest Road Manual*.
- Where there are no aquatic zones or relevant watercourses on site, this should be stated clearly on the biodiversity map and in the road specification.
- **Companies are requested to review applications on hand and based on above send any missing information to [forestryappeng@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:forestryappeng@agriculture.gov.ie).**

### Afforestation Licence Applications

- Afforestation represents a land use change, so from an ecological perspective the existing onsite habitats and their possible use by protected species, require particular attention.
- Therefore, a Pre-Screening Report and associated Habitat & Receiving Environment Map should be generated, (See Circular 13 of 2020), along with an Ecological Report if there is any non-AA ecology related issue. The Pre-screening Report must include a description and assessment of the habitats present on site including any links or not to Annex I habitats.
- In some cases, it may be possible to address other biodiversity in the description and results of the Ecological Survey and associated maps in the Appendix of the Pre-screening report.
- It may not be possible to process afforestation applications referred to Ecology without the above reports and map.
- The Department is more likely to request NISs for afforestation licence applications compared to tree felling and forest road works licence applications.
- It is important that Forestry Companies and Registered Foresters examine their applications that are referred to Ecology to provide additional information outlined above, and engage an Ecologist as required. The involvement of an Ecologist during the summer months is particularly timely, as these months overlap with the field season for botanical surveys. Other seasonal/timing constraints may also apply. Any additional information as outlined above can be sent to [forestryappeng@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:forestryappeng@agriculture.gov.ie).

As always, please withdraw any application of which you are aware, will not go ahead.

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