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PRESS RELEASE

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WINDBLOW GUIDANCE ISSUES TO FOREST OWNERS

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Tom Hayes today welcomed the progress the 'Windblow Taskforce' is making on gathering information about the extent of the forest damage caused by recent storms. In particular, the Minister praised the comprehensive Guidance Note that the group has produced. *"I fully understand the shock and anguish experienced by forest owners whose forests have been blown over by the recent storm. This guidance note gives reassurance to forest owners that all is not lost and that fallen trees still have value. The document also lays down the steps to consider in safely harvesting and selling the fallen trees and gives advice on a range of other associated issues"*. Early indications suggest that less than 1% of the forest area and approx 1% of the forest volume has blown down, somewhere between 5,000 and 7,000 hectares mainly concentrated in Munster.

The Minister added that *"Teagasc forestry advisers will meet any forest owner in the Teagasc Offices for a one-to-one meeting to discuss this and any other forestry matter. I would also strongly urge forest owners to get professional advice from qualified foresters to guide them through this process"*. Speaking about the role of the sawmills following this damage, the Minister commented that *"Ireland has an export-focussed, world class sawmill and panel board sector. This sector has ample capacity currently to process the blown material over the next 8 to 10 months"*.

The Windblow Taskforce chaired by Minister Hayes comprises the IFFPA, Coillte, IFA, ITGA and the Forest Service, DAFM. The aim of the group is to assess the damage nationally and to quickly identify the various issues that have arisen and that will arise as a result of the severe

windblow event of the 12th February, and to agree on a course of actions to deal with these issues.

Notes to Editors

The following is the full text of the Guidance note circulated to the Forestry Sector.

Guidance for Forest Owners with Windblow

March 2014

The recent storms have caused damage in many Irish forests particularly in the south of the country. While initial estimates put the area damaged at less than 1% of the total forest area, locally the damage has been severe, with significant volumes of roundwood impacted. To deal with this windblown timber it is important that timber growers are aware of the various steps to take in assessing and planning the harvest of this timber.

Stakeholders in the forestry sector have come together under the chairmanship of the Minister of State for Forestry, Tom Hayes TD, to co-ordinate a response to this storm damage. This **Windblow Taskforce** is currently endeavouring to:

1. Estimate the area, volume and extent of the damage nationally,
2. Make recommendations to address the many issues that will arise in relation to the windblow event,
3. Make recommendations for the orderly removal of windblown timber from damaged forests.

For forest owners who have experienced windblow the most important advice is not to rush into decisions but to make a step-by-step plan to minimise risk and maximise the salvage value of your plantation. Most forests, despite being blown, can have considerable timber value. The following steps will assist forest owners in planning and harvesting:

1. **Think Safety** first, a windblown forest is a dangerous place. Only qualified and insured people should be permitted access. All parties have legal obligations when carrying out forestry operations under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1989:

http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Agriculture_and_Forestry/Code%20of%20Practice%20Forestry%202009-.pdf

2. If your plantation is insured for windblow, **contact your insurance company** immediately. Inform them that your plantation is damaged. The insurance company will assign an assessor to assess the damage.
3. Get **independent advice** from a Teagasc Forestry Adviser (For a one-to-one free advisory session in a Teagasc office, find the local adviser in your County at <http://www.teagasc.ie/forestry/advice/index.asp>) or from a qualified forestry professional who will meet you on-the-ground, and also other qualified professionals such as insurance advisors, taxation experts, etc. A qualified forester can assist you in the various steps outlined below. See the Forest Service website for a list of Registered Foresters:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/forestservicgeneralinformation/RegisterofForestersandForestryCompanies250214.pdf>

4. **Assess** the area, timber volume and likely value of the windblow in your forest. In addition assess the adjacent area that has not blown. Taking account of factors such as age, area and risk of windblow, a decision will need to be made whether or not it is best to retain the adjoining area and to allow it to grow on to normal clearfell age, or to harvest this area together with the area that has suffered windblow. Most plantations are unlikely to be entirely blown. Where a forest is partially windblown, it is important that a forestry professional assesses the remaining standing trees for stability. Where the forester deems that such trees are unstable, these should be included in the felling licence application.
5. **Apply for a Felling Licence** from Forest Service to fell/harvest the windblown timber and potentially any adjacent trees that may be at risk of windblow after the felling/removal of the windblown trees. Mark your application 'Storm Damage' to allow it to be prioritised by the Forest Service. If there is an existing licence for the land, please specify the licence number in your new felling licence application. The existing licence has to be cancelled before a new licence can issue as the same land cannot have two licences. Please ensure that the felling licence is signed by the land owner and where clearfelling is

6. proposed, that details of the species being replanted are provided. See the Forest Service website for further information:
<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service/tree-felling/tree-felling/>
7. Consider **access to the forest** and specifically the windblown area and if necessary apply for a roading grant from the Forest Service, DAFM. Applications should be submitted before the end of March 2014 and can be made through a forester on the approved list.
8. Under the **Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act**, 1989 there is an obligation on landowners to gather information about site hazards and to produce a site risk assessment together with a site hazards map.
9. **Market** the windblown timber and get professional advice on current prices. Joining with a group of forest owners to sell timber will provide you with scale and efficiency. It may also reduce costs thereby maximising salvage value. Larger timber lots are more attractive to buyers.
10. Have a strong **Timber Sales Contract** in place to protect the interests of all parties and to ensure compliance with environmental requirements, Felling Licence, Health and Safety, indemnity, insurance, agreed harvesting procedures, timber prices, duration of contract, arbitration provisions, relevant maps and schedules and other requirements. A forestry professional should be able to provide you with such a contract or the Template Master Tree Sales Agreement produced by the Irish Timber Growers Association should be consulted.
11. Control the movement of timber from your site using a strong **Timber Sales Dispatch System** for security and accountability in timber sales. Again a forestry professional will provide this or see the ITGA Model Timber Sales Dispatch System:
<http://www.itga.ie/docs/MTSSApril2010.pdf>
12. **Supervision and monitoring** of the sale and harvesting operations will ensure you are complying with best practice and the provisions of the Felling Licence.
13. **Close off the sale and record keeping** – This is important for accounting and tax, Health and Safety, various environmental and other obligations. Make sure all timber is accounted for, paid for and that proper records are maintained.
14. **Replanting plan** – Plan your harvest in conjunction with subsequent replanting, which is a legal obligation after felling. A badly planned and implemented harvesting operation will potentially increase the replanting cost, ground damage and the ability of your forest to recover quickly.

The Windblow Taskforce is chaired by Minister Tom Hayes and is made up of the following:

- Irish Forest and Forest Products Association (IFFPA)
- Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA)
- Coillte
- Irish Farmers Association (IFA)
- Forest Service, DAFM

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