

### Save Ireland's Forests Campaign Continues

The Woodland League have been consistently warning the Irish public about the proposal to sell off their public forests since June 2009. A petition to this effect was set up in November 2010 and has to date been signed by over 30,000 people. The League has also highlighted the fact that Coillte (The Irish Forestry Board), has in effect been managing the public forest estate for the benefit of private investors, pension fund companies and developers, since 1989. Public money in the form of 100% forestry grants continues to be handed over to private interests, who also avail of tax-free status on these investments.

With regard to the article "Sell off peat bogs and forests but keep land, says report" by Brendan Keenan, in the Irish independent on Monday 21st March 2011 which refers to the McCarthy report on the sale of state assets.

Andrew St. Ledger (PRO The Woodland League) says "The recent statements by Fine Gael and Labour claiming Coillte was not for sale may prove to be, in retrospect, quite hollow and premature."

The sale of state assets report confirms the fact that Coillte's profits have come mainly from the sale of land and young forests and it's performance is poor compared with international standards. St. Ledger went on to say "Leaving aside the contradictory content of the Keenan article - calling for the sale of the forests and peat while the state retains the land with nothing on it - there needs to be an investigation into the activities of Coillte, and all information relating to how it has conducted it's business placed in the public domain, bearing in mind Coillte's remit (under the 1988 Forestry Act which set them up) was to manage the public forest resource wisely for the benefit of the country."

The League believe, among the many questions relating to how the public forests have been managed, these four are the most relevant regarding the imminent threat of sale:

1. How many gifts of land to the Irish people via trusts and conveyances that went through the land commission and the forest service ending up in Coillte's land bank still exist, and how many have been sold off? For example, Monivea forest of 400 acres in Galway was gifted in trust to the people of Ireland by Lady Kathleen Ffrench in 1939.
2. What portion of the publicly owned forests and trees have been sold already to private investors, pension fund companies and banks?
3. How much land compulsory purchased using the little known 1956 Forestry Act, specifically for the purposes of afforestation have been sold on for other purposes?
4. How much harvesting of timber has occurred since 2009, for the benefit of private investors, pension-fund companies and banks, using general felling licences that were applied for a number of years ago? According to Donal Whelan of the Irish Timber Growers Association in a Sunday Tribune article, 2010, felling license applications had increased by 85% in that year. Harvesting is not meant to exceed re-planting in order to maintain a sustained yield, in accordance with the States own Forestry Strategic Plan.

Reference is made to the New Zealand public forest privatisation model in the article, this involved the breaking up of their forest estate into pieces, managed by numerous private companies, creating environmental and social issues which led to a petition garnering 155,000 signatures to halt this privatisation.

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Save Ireland's Forests petition <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/2/help-save-irelands-forests/>

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