**OUR TREESHOCK**

When Enda Kenny took office, it was widely believed that, at last, a safe pair of hands was at Ireland’s helm.

It was therefore very strange to see our Taoiseach attending an Industrial tree harvesting ceremony during National Tree week, at the behest of the Private Cheshire Homes charity. This charity has invested in one of the many pension funds utilising Public forestry grants from exchequer funds...for profit.

It was stranger still to see the shocking image of Mr Kenny wielding an axe, to vigorously chop down an individual tree on site during National Tree week 4th until 10th March,whilst all around the country local individuals and community groups were planting native trees such as oak, ash, birch and holly. This PR show was completely inappropriate considering the countrywide activities involving school children who were being encouraged to foster a respect and reverence for our severely diminished native tree resource.

Ted Cook, a native woodland specialist, of the Woodland League and Macroom District Environmental Group (MDEG) was engaged in these activities, tours and presentations, in the Cork region. His audience included adults and children with special needs. One of Ted’s six scheduled Tree Council events during tree week was covered by RTE’s Nationwide programme. This was the walk into an aboriginal oak wood, the last alluvial post-glacial forest west of the Danube, situated in the Gearagh Valley, outside Macroom, Co Cork.

Mr Cook stated...“ ***The Taoiseach’s action and comments caused much confusion and alarm within the communities that I was visiting during the week*** ”. Enda Kenny’s clear message forcefully informing us that trees were planted to be cut down purely for profit was wholly inappropriate and disheartening especially to those who embrace and envision a Sustainable future.

This vision was enshrined in the Rio Principles for Sustainable Development of 1992, to which the State signed up to on all of our behalf. Twenty years later a Rio + 20 conference is set to occur this summer, to revisit those same Principles in regard to progress made in their implementation, or not as is the case in Ireland. The Tree Council of Ireland who organise National Tree week received one million punts from the State in 1996 in order to celebrate our native trees, when John Bruton also of Fine Gael was the Taoiseach. The theme for Tree Week this year was ‘ **Crainn, Inniu, Amárach, Trees our Past Present, our Future’**. This theme is not reflected in our current Taoiseach’s action whatsoever.

We are also aware that under Section 37 of the 1946 Forestry act, it is an offence to uproot damage or fell any tree in the State over ten years of age, without a felling license. We are assuming the harvesting company Greenbelt had obtained a felling license to carry out their works. We are curious to know if Mr Kenny had an individual license giving him the authority to fell that tree. The general felling license is very specific as to who is carrying out the felling and strict safety measures involving a series of certificates for the completion of safety courses.

What message is this Taoiseach communicating to the Public, during National Tree Week via the State broadcaster RTE, as well as the photo and caption on the front page of a National newspaper? There needs to be immediate clarification from the Taoiseach’s office, as people may feel free to go into EU-designated protected woodlands and cut down any tree they wish. Is Mr Kenny promoting a free for all, at a time when Ireland’s record for breaches of EU environmental law is among the worst in Europe?

In addition to the insensitivities listed above, Mr Kenny has also shown disrespect for the Gaelic forest culture and traditions as embodied in the renowned ancient Brehon law code, which protected trees and encouraged their wise use and management for at least two thousand years. This same Brehon law code is where the titles of Taoiseach and The Dáil itself are derived from.

**“Cad a dhéanfaimid feasta gan adhmad? Tá deireadh na gcoillte ar lár”**

“What will we do without our woods? Now the forest lies low”

Daibhí Ó Bruadair (circa 1700’s), a brehon poet lamenting the loss of the great Irish forests in his famous poem *Caoine Cill Chais*

Link below to the Rio Declaration on the environment 1992

[www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?documentid=78&articleid=1163](http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?documentid=78&articleid=1163)

Link below to the 1946 Irish Forestry act

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1946/en/act/pub/0013/index.html>

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

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