**IFA Submission:**

***Identifying Land Availability and Examining Constraints and Incentives to Achieve Afforestation Goals***

17th August 2012

1. *What are the Main Issues Affecting the Availability of land for Afforestation?*

We believe that a considerable amount of land is ineligible for afforestation because of restrictions on certain land types. Forestry is beneficial to both the environment and local communities yet it is hindered by numerous restrictions from Hen Harrier habitats, unenclosed ground, acid sensitive areas etc.

The reduced premium on unenclosed land is also a barrier to land availability as it cannot compete with other commodity prices, which are currently very strong.

1. *What are the Main Constraints to Achieving Afforestation Goals?*

Afforestation goals depend not only on the availability of land but also the desire of those in possession of the land to enter the afforestation scheme.

The amount of land which is available for planting is limited by restrictions and hindered by competition from alternative land uses. Restrictions on afforestation of land, whether it is unenclosed or acid sensitive, have reduced the available area for planting.

Land owners are also beginning to question the commitment of the government toward the afforestation program. Apart from yearly budget uncertainty there was a lack of confidence after the premium reduction in 2009 and the realisation that forestry income is no longer strictly tax free. Landowners who enter into the afforestation program commit their lands to forestry in perpetuity. This is a major decision for any landowner but the lack of confidence in the state has done nothing to reassure those who were considering the option.

Uncertainty regarding CAP from 2013 and the consequences for SFP on forestry lands is also having an impact on farmer decisions.



1. *What Incentives would support the Achievement of these Goals?*

Firstly we feel that restrictions need to be removed to release land which is productive and which would be planted if the restriction were not in place.

With regard to incentives to attract people to the program there are a number of possible solutions. The most straightforward incentive is a guaranteed premium level for a certain number of years. The creation of a more straight forward and less complicated application process for the forestry program and the related licences is another shortcoming of the program which has been identified.

We also see the reestablishment of the tax free nature of forestry income as an essential factor to increase confidence in the area and increase afforestation interest. The increase in premiums to compete with other prices and the removal of the forestry in perpetuity requirement are also incentives which we are certain would have a significant influence on the planting rate.