

MEDIA RELEASE

MAJOR BOOST FOR FOREST ROAD CONSTRUCTION IN COUNTY CLARE

County Clare, IRELAND, 26th January 2007 - Minister for Labour Affairs and Clare T.D., Tony Killeen has called on all forestry owners in Clare wishing to improve access to their lands to apply for grant aid funding from the Department of Agriculture and Food. Minister Killeen's call comes after the Government announced a major increase in grants for the construction of forest roads.

Ms. Mary Wallace T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food, today (Friday) announced that a new maximum grant of EUR45 a linear metre is being established. This new grant ceiling takes account of the fact that construction costs have increased significantly over the years since the scheme was established and will ensure that the grant available maintains its relative value.

Minister Killeen said, "The increase in grants comes as a huge boost to forest-owners planning ahead for harvesting. Grants cover 80% of the cost of construction and with increasing numbers of County Clare's private forest estates reaching maturity, there is a real need to encourage the construction of roads now."

Minister Killeen reiterated the Government's commitment to maintaining and enhancing the package of incentives available for forestry.

"We have witnessed increases in afforestation grants of up to 25% in the last two years, while the annual forestry premium paid to farm foresters is to increase by 15%, with a new maximum payment of up to EUR574 per hectare per annum. Allied to the possibility of stacking the Single Farm Payment entitlements to a level of 50% where forestry is involved and the opportunities opened up by the new FEPS pilot Scheme, I firmly believe that the Government has assembled the best ever package for forestry." the Minister said.

"Growing the trees is only half the job. We need to be able to access the timber at harvesting time safely and efficiently and that's why I believe it is so important that we invest in these roads around the county", the Minister said.

“With demand for timber high, and new markets opening every day for wood energy, it had never made more sense to plant trees. We in Clare are moving into a new era for agriculture as well as for forestry and I believe that every farmer in this county needs to rethink the potential of forestry for himself and the local community”, he concluded.

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