

MEDIA RELEASE

FORESTRY MANAGEMENT PROTOCOL TO ASSIST RECOVERY OF HEN HARRIER SPECIES IN SLIEVE AUGHTY MOUNTAINS - KILLEEN

IRELAND, 26th March 07 - Minister for Labour Affairs and Clare T.D., Mr. Tony Killeen has welcomed the news that the Slieve Aughty Mountains in Clare and Galway are to be shortly designated as Special Protection Areas (SPA). The Minister said that the designation would allow for sustainable forestry management and the increased protection of the hen harrier species.

A relatively large population exists in the Slieve Aughty Mountains, with a smaller population found in parts of West Clare. In Ireland, the bird has suffered much decline and is particularly endangered due to loss of habitat, with the national breeding survey of 1998-2000 estimating up to 131 breeding pairs. Under the European Union Birds Directive, to preserve what is left of the species, Ireland is obliged to implement SPAs for the hen harrier and apply appropriate land management directions and other measures within these areas.

Minister Killeen expressed delight that agreement had been reached on a management protocol for planting in areas that are important for the hen harrier.

He continued, *“The agreement follows on from recent meetings I had with Mr. Dick Roche TD, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and Ms. Mary Wallace T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food, over the new Forest Environment Protection Scheme (FEPS). During the meetings, I requested an extension of FEPS to include such areas as the Slieve Aughty Mountains where farmers are currently unable to get approval for afforestation. I suggested that the proper management and development of forestry in this area would have positive benefits for hen harriers.”*

He continued, *“The Slieve Aughty Mountains, a common hunting ground for endangered hen harriers, will shortly become one of six areas across Ireland to be designated as a SPA. The protection of the species has always been a matter of concern for environmentalists and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) due to the high level of forestry activity in the area. However, the introduction of an annual quota of new planting will ensure greater protection for the native hen harriers while allowing for the sustained development of the region.”*