

## **Wallace Announces EU Approval Of Ireland's Afforestation Grant And Premium Scheme**

**Ms. Mary Wallace T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food with responsibility for Forestry, today announced the approval by the EU Commission of Ireland's Afforestation Programme 2007-2013.**

Minister of State Wallace commented, *"I am pleased to announce the authorisation by the EU Commission for our new Afforestation Programme, which follows long and detailed negotiation between my Department and the Commission. This provides welcome stability at a crucial time for Irish forestry and allows us to focus our efforts on new planting. As noted by the EU Commission, forest cover in Ireland is the second lowest in the European Union. It is my hope that this aid package, worth more than EUR900m over the period 2007 - 2013, will re-energise the forestry programme and that we will see a steady increase in our forest-cover over the next seven years"*.

The aid package for afforestation will be paid out under the various Afforestation grant and premium schemes, operated by the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Food. Aid of up to 100% will be available for establishment of forests. The establishment grants will be conditional on compliance with the *'Code of Best Forest Practice - Ireland'*, and with environmental and forestry practice guidelines. There is also provision for annual forestry premiums, payable to both farmers and non-farmers.

In addition to the main Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme, yesterday's decision by the European Commission also includes approval of the Forest Environment Protection Scheme (FEPS), which has already been operating on a pilot basis this year. It also clears the way for the introduction of two new measures: first afforestation of non-agricultural land and agro-forestry.

Minister Wallace pointed out that the new forestry programme would be wholly funded from the Exchequer and would no longer be dependent on EU funding.

Minister of State Wallace concluded by encouraging all farmers to consider forestry as a viable land use and to take into account its compatibility with other enterprises and the numerous financial and environmental benefits arising from afforestation. She added *"With generous concessions having already been established regarding the Single Farm Payment Scheme, recent increases in the rate of establishment grant and annual premium, the recent development of the new Forest Environment Protection Scheme (FEPS) and the Commission's approval of the programme for the next seven years, there has never been a better time to plant."*

**14 September, 2007**