Forestry in Ireland: An Overview

Áine Ní Dhubháin

University College Dublin

Ireland

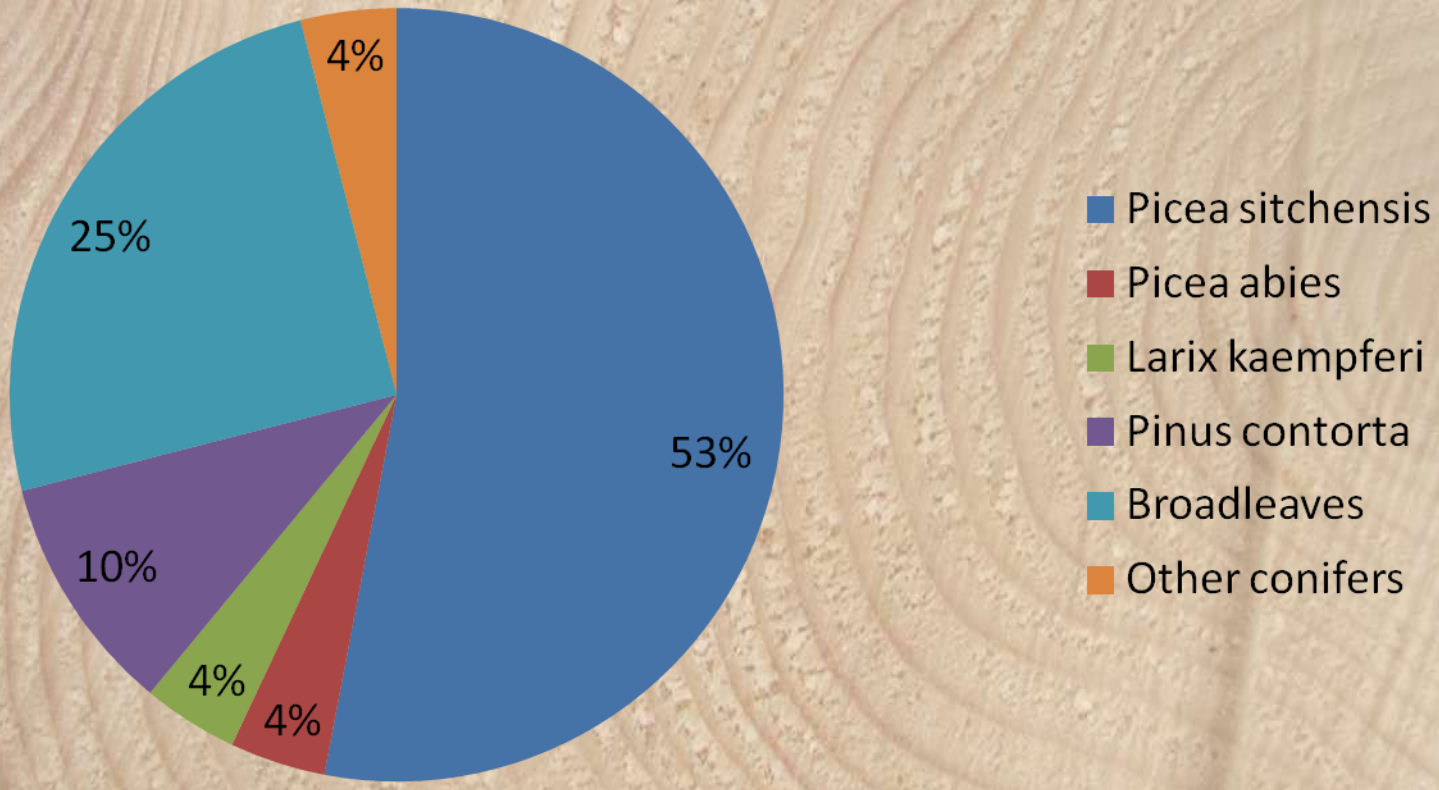
Forestry in Ireland

- **The current situation**
- **How did we get to here?**
- **The future of forestry**

Forestry in Ireland in 2011

- **745,457 hectares – 10.8% of land area**
- **Fast growth rates (18 $m^3ha^{-1}an^{-1}$)**
- **Two-thirds of the forests are less than 20 years of age**
- **45.6% privately owned by 17,000 farmers**

Species distribution



Timber industry

- **Timber output from forests – > 2.5 million m^3**
- **Nine large/medium sized sawmills**
- **Processed 1.7 million m^3 roundwood (70% of timber supply) in 2009 → 0.849 million m^3 sawnwood**
  - **Construction – 292,000**
  - **Pallets/packaging – 254,000**
  - **Fencing/stakes – 288,000**
  - **Other – 15,000**

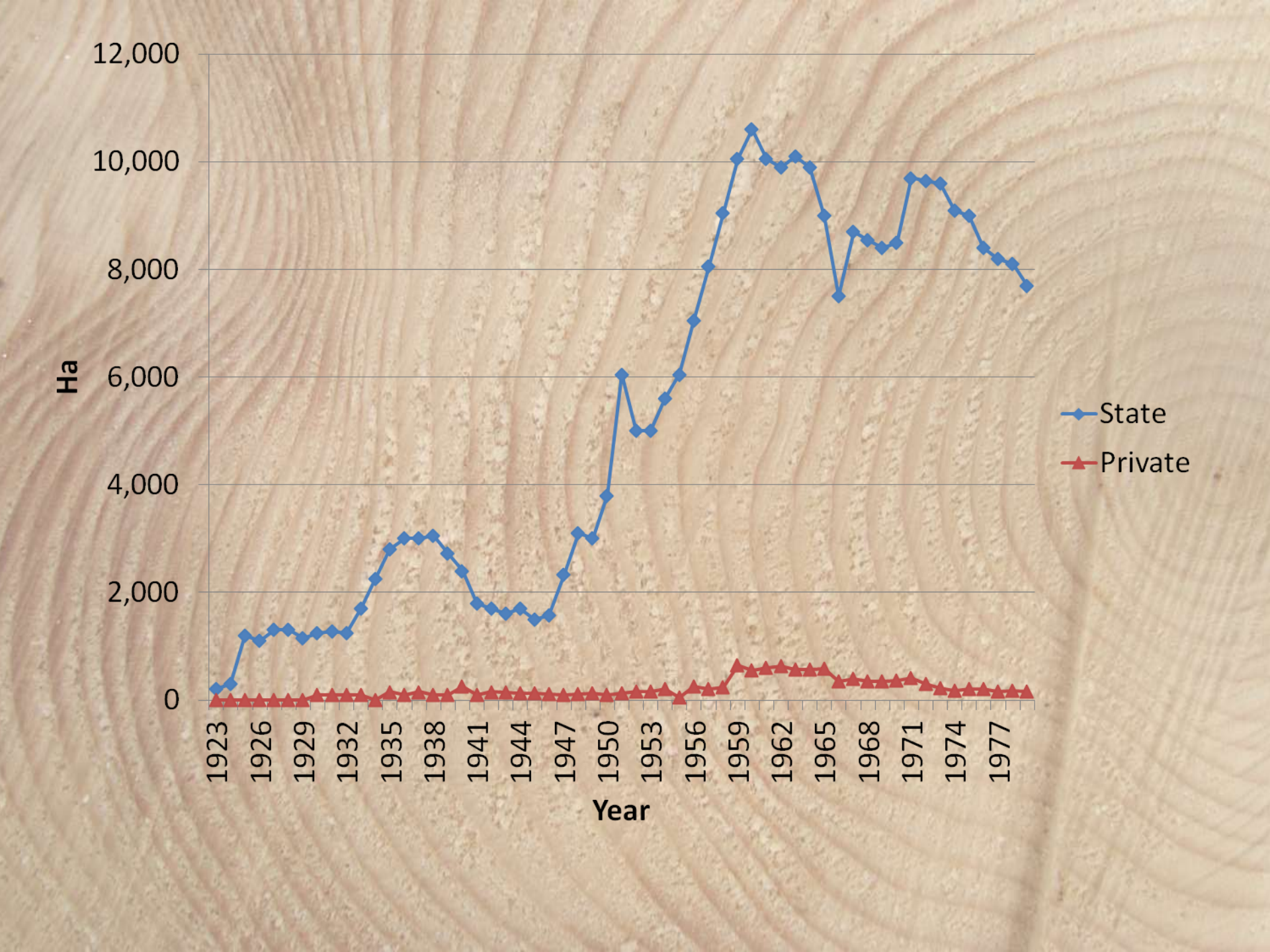
- **Exported 563,000 million m^3 in 2009**

How did the current forest situation arise?

- **Following centuries of decline in forest cover, 1% of land area under forest in 1900**
- **“As treeless as Portugal we’ll soon become” (from Ulysses by James Joyce, 1904)**
- **A State afforestation programme began in early 1900**
- **Aim to become self-sufficient in timber production**

Type of land planted

- **Forestry confined to the poor soils**
- **Better land reserved for agriculture**
- **In late 1940s afforestation in western counties, bogs etc planted**
- **Aim: to generate employment in these areas**
- **Result: Only exotic conifers could survive, Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine**


12,000
10,000
8,000
6,000
4,000
2,000
0
Ha
1923
1926
1929
1932
1935
1938
1941
1944
1947
1950
1953
1956
1959
1962
1965
1968
1971
1974
1977
Year
State
Private

Why so little private planting?

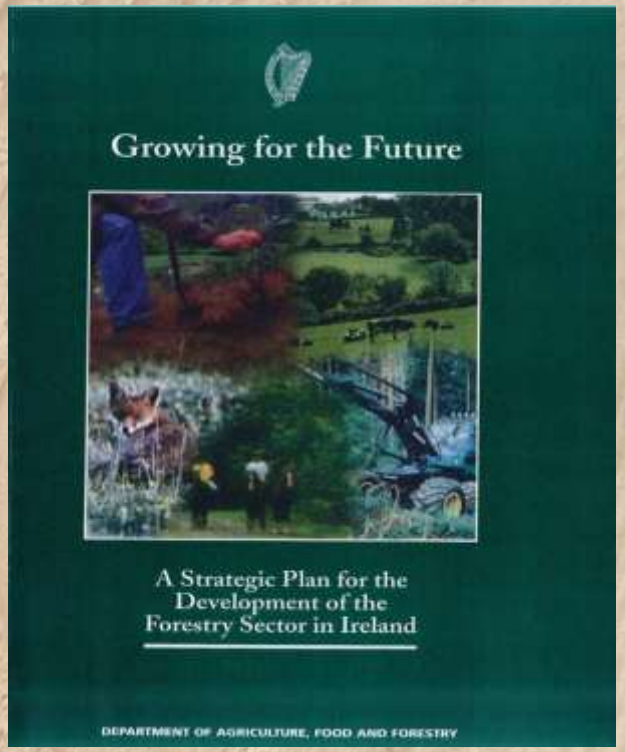
- **Look to history**
- **Irish were tenants until late 19th century; landlords planted trees for recreational purposes**
- **Tenants "looked enviously across the walls of the estates at the recreational forests"**
- **When tenants assumed ownership of land – used to feed families**
- **No tradition of farm forestry; peat=fuel**

The 1980s and beyond

- **EU –funding for forestry made available for the first time in Ireland**
- **Grants to farmers in the western counties for afforestation**
- **1990 – annual premiums (for up to 20 years) to landowners who afforested**
- **Substantial increase in private planting**
- **Better quality land; more broadleaves planted**

Growing for the future - 1996

To develop forestry to a scale and in a manner which maximises its contribution to national economic and social well-being on a sustainable basis and which is compatible with the protection of the environment



Why Government/EU investment in forestry?

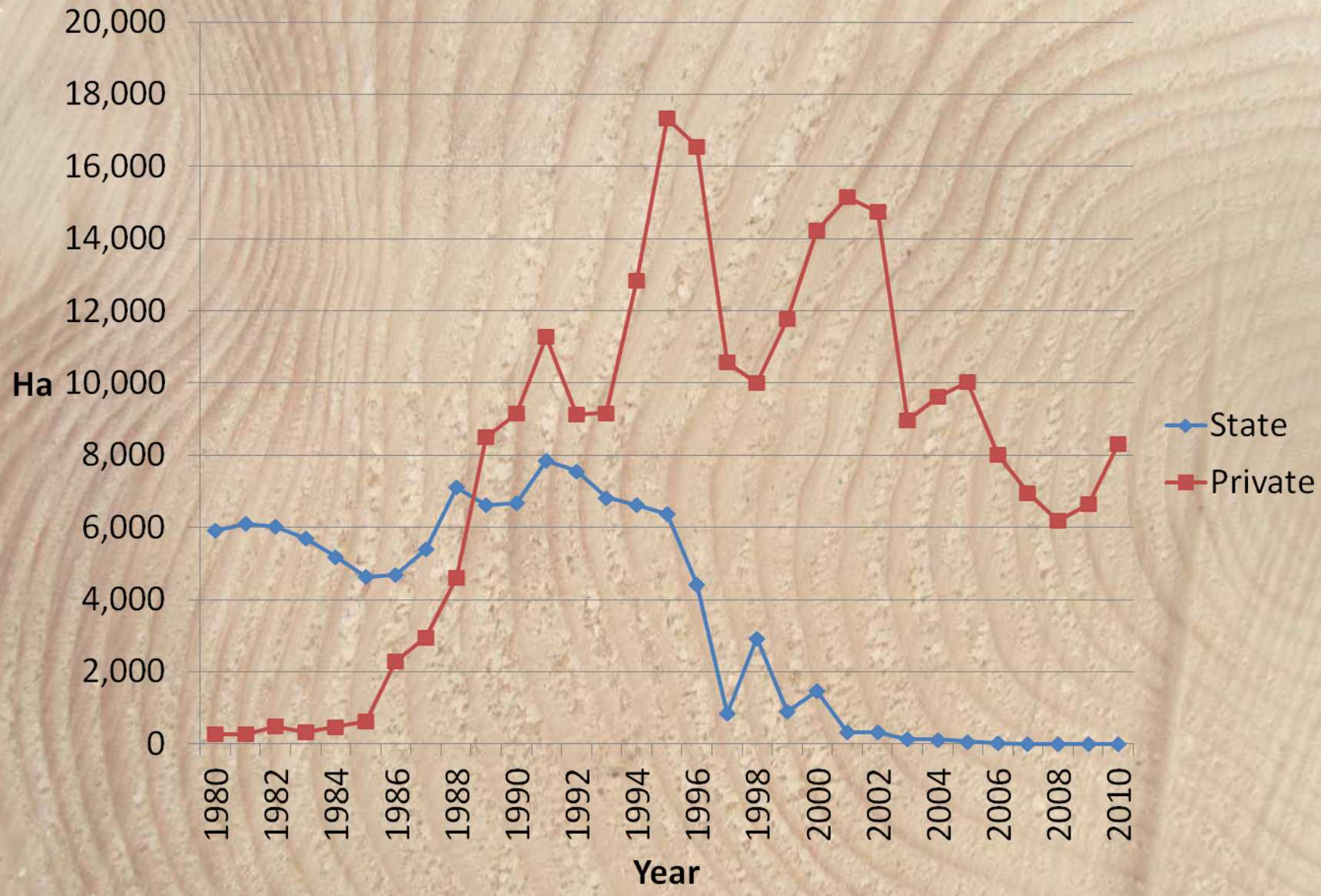
- **Reach target size for the industry (critical mass and employment)**
- **Critical mass - a scale of timber production large enough to make true competition and the operation of market forces possible and to support a range of processing industries**
- **10 million m^3 per annum**

How to achieve critical mass?

- **Afforestation levels of 25,000 ha to year 2000; and 20,000 ha to year 2030**
- **Total productive area to go from 464,000 ha (7% of land area) to 1.2 million ha (17%); timber production to rise from 2.2 million m^3 to 10.0 million m^3**
- **A ratio of 30:70 public and private afforestation**

Strategy successful?

- **Planting targets not reached both in terms of total area planted and ratio public:private**
- **Planting by State/Coillte Teo* ceased due to its ineligibility for the premium (1 August 1996)**
  - *** Coillte Teo., (The Irish Forestry Board) was established in 1989, took over the management of the State forests with a mandate to manage them on a commercial basis**


20,000
18,000
16,000
14,000
12,000
10,000
8,000
6,000
4,000
2,000
0
Ha
1980
1982
1984
1986
1988
1990
1992
1994
1996
1998
2000
2002
2004
2006
2008
2010
Year
State
Private

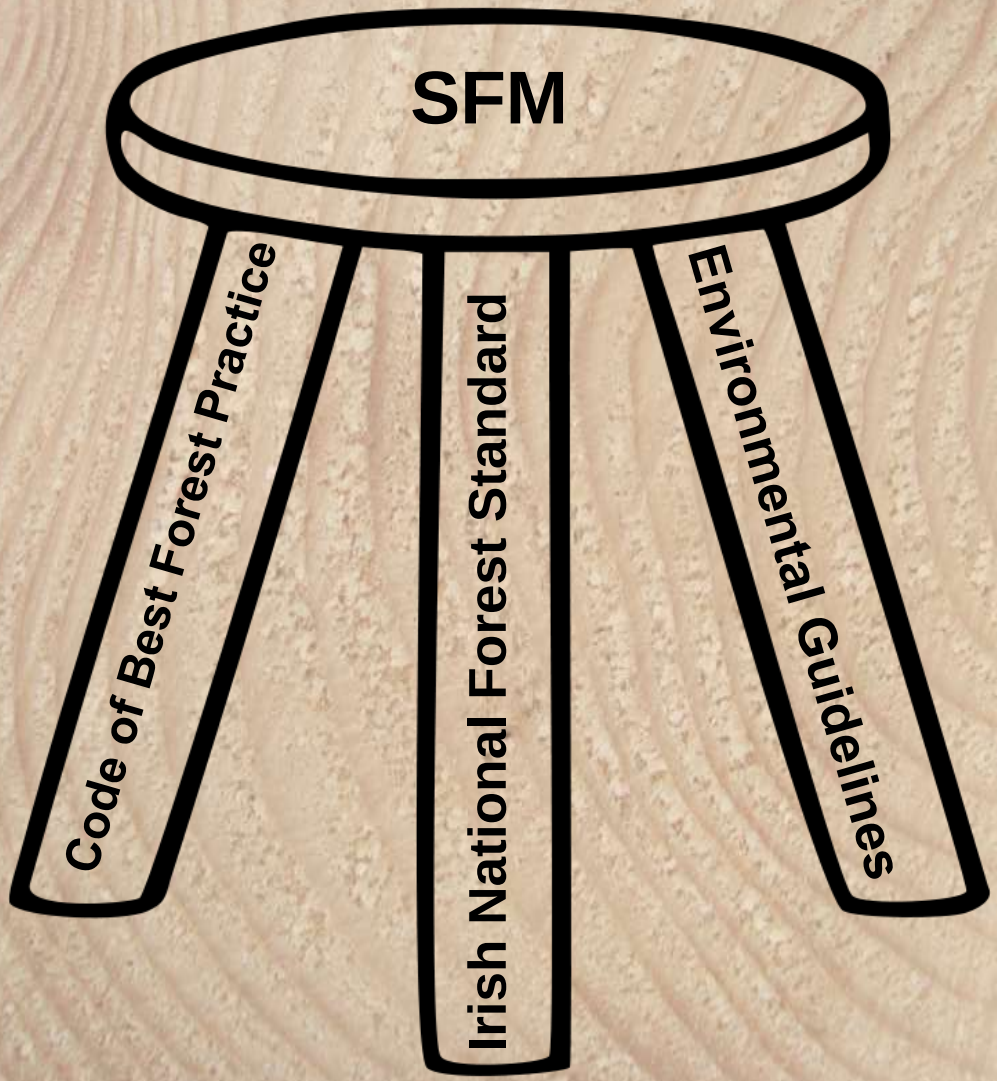
Strategy successful?

- **Planting by farmers also not as high as expected**
  - **Returns from forestry are competitive with those from agriculture**

  But

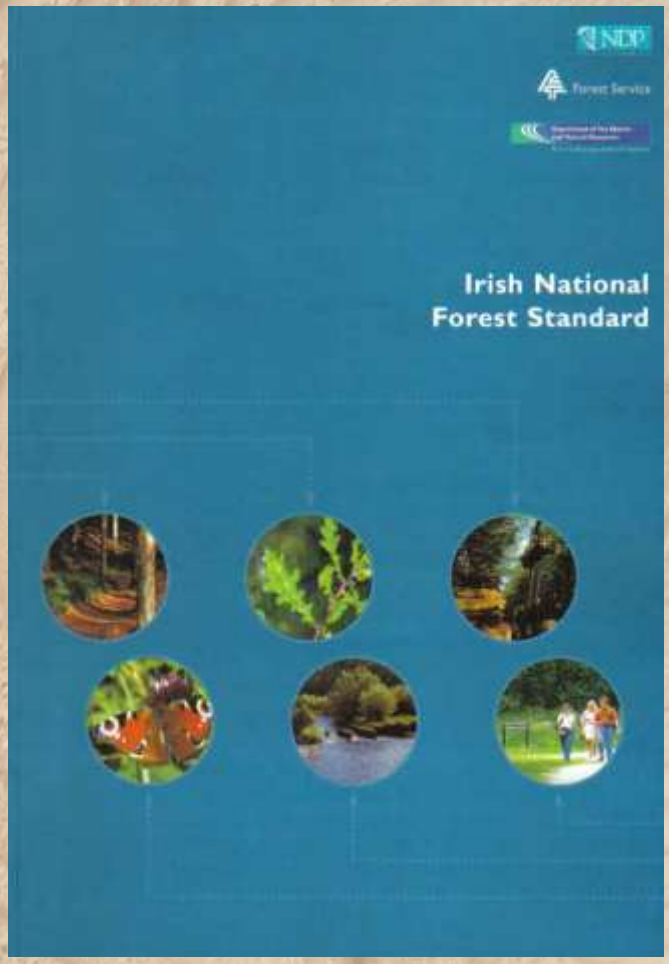
  - **Decision to plant also influenced by:**
    - **Value of land tends to fall once it has been planted**
    - **Decision to plant is irreversible**
    - **Cultural/social issues**

Sustainable forest management in Ireland



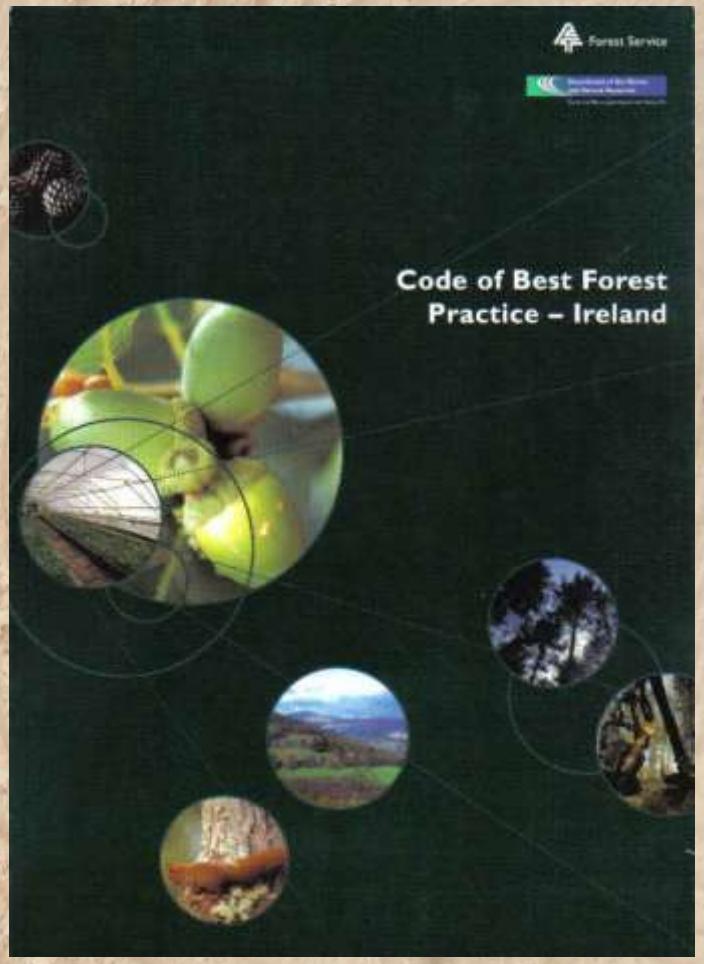
Irish National Forest Standard (2000)

- **Outlines the basic criteria and indicators relating to the implementation of SFM**
- **Lists a series of qualitative and quantitative measures by which progress towards the practice of SFM can be monitored under forest conditions**

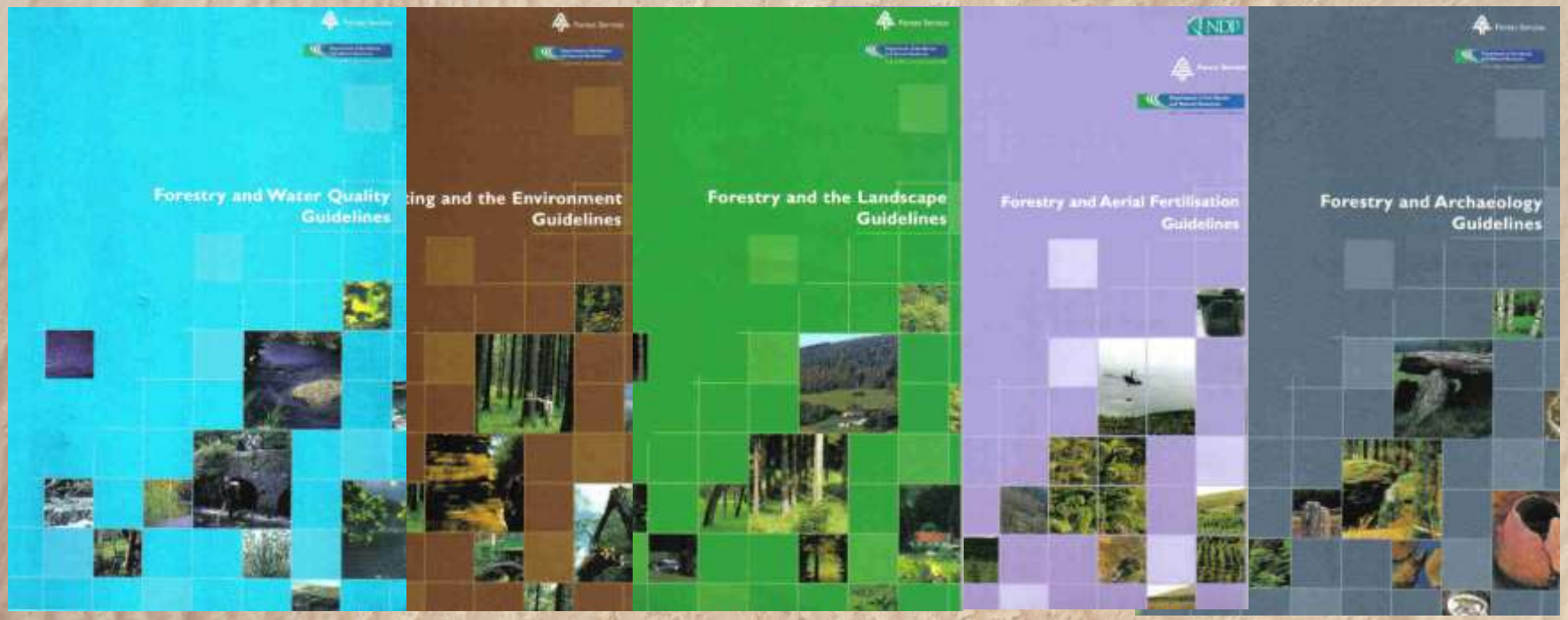


Code of Best Forest Practice (2000)

- **Designed to ensure that forest operations are carried out in a way which meets high environmental, social and economic standards**
- **For each operation, the following are outlined:**
  - **Key factors; Objectives; Procedures; Adverse impacts; Best practice**



Suite of Environmental Guidelines



Forest Certification in Ireland

- **Since 2001, Coillte's forests are certified under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) scheme**
- **The certificate is issued for five years**
- **In 2006 Coillte successfully retained its FSC certificate following a full audit of its forests**
- **In the interim years, strict audits were carried out on Coillte's forests to ensure that FSC criteria were being met**

Forest Certification and private forest owners

- **Currently two national forest certification standards being ratified for Ireland**
  - **PEFC (http://pefc.ie)**
  - **FSC (http://www.irishforestcertification.com/fsc-ireland)**
- **Expensive for individual owners (8 ha)**
- **Group certification schemes**


Strengths
Weaknesses
The Future of Forestry
Opportunities
Threats

Strengths

- **Forests are sustainably managed**
- **Highly productive forests, providing economic return on investment**
- **Increasing forest cover**
- **Increasing timber output**

Strengths

- **Modern and efficient timber harvesting and processing industries**
- **Increasing timber exports**
- **Few pests and diseases in forests**

Weaknesses

- **Over-reliance on one (exotic) species**
- **Fragmented nature of (private) estate**
- **Lack of management in private forests**
- **Harvesting and transport infrastructure (in private forests)**

Weaknesses

- **No paper mills**
- **Forests located on difficult soils and in sensitive landscapes**

Opportunities

- **Increase demand for timber worldwide**
- **Emerging wood biomass/bio-processing sectors**
- **Monetary return for carbon sequestration**
- **Expand export market for timber**
- **Expand range of ecosystem services**




Threats

- **Deer damage, grey squirrel**
- **Regulations**
- **Pests e.g. Phytophtera ramorum**
- **Uncertainty about continued government support for grants and premiums**

Threats

- **Climate change – drought, storms, flooding (Sitka spruce)**
- **Uncertain timber supply from private woods**
- **Emerging wood biomass sector**
- **Continuing recession**

Go raibh míle maith agaibh!