



The draft Forestry Land Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2011

Response from RSPB Northern Ireland to the draft Forestry Land Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2011

RSPB Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this public consultation on proposed byelaws for forestry land owned or leased to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), including Forest Service managed land.

The RSPB notes the need for these byelaws to help implement DARD and Forest Service's duty to further the conservation of biodiversity under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill (Northern Ireland) 2011 in relation to the management and operation of the state forest. The RSPB also notes the general duty on DARD and Forest Service to sustainable forestry, including on state forestry land, under Section 1 of the Forestry Bill (Northern Ireland) 2010.

The RSPB considers that that the new byelaws must:

- ensure that disturbance to wildlife is avoided, including by the appropriate design of forest management, the type and timing of forestry/woodland management operations and all activities;
- ensure sustainable forest management, including protection and enhancement of biodiversity: priority species, priority habitats and designated wildlife sites;
- permit the restoration of open priority ground habitats, such as blanket peatland, breeding wading bird sites, semi-natural grassland and areas for raptors; &
- encourage the creation and retention of deadwood habitats of high biodiversity quality for priority wildlife species.

The RSPB supports the inclusion of wildlife disturbance in the draft legislation, under Clause 7. We do, however, have concerns about the practical implementation of Clause 7 in relation to planned forest management and felling by Forest Service.

We are concerned about the effectiveness of the consenting regime for felling on state forest land, where there is to be no felling licensing, just long-term forest management planning. It is important that forestry operations, including felling, are carefully timed, appropriately located, designed, managed and monitored to avoid wildlife disturbance. This requires site level knowledge of biodiversity, backed up by appropriate ecological survey and monitoring, to feed into the appropriate design, timing, management and monitoring of individual forest operations at particular times, seasons and locations.

As Forest Service has been exempted from the felling licensing process, it is important that it meets similar conditions to those outlined in the proposed felling licensing regulations – the Forestry (Felling of Trees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 - through the scrutiny, design and operation of its forest management and any felling/restocking plans. Forest Service's forest plans, as well as felling and replanting plans, need an approval process that includes public consultation and input from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

RSPB Northern Ireland, June 2011.

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