

EXTENSIVE & INTENSIVE RURAL LAND USES

SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS.

EXTENSIVE USES

Afforestation

Greater emphasis will be placed on broadleaf planting the 4000Ha broadleaf target has been met 5000Ha achieved. The farmers grant is the major reason but planting is taking place on the poorest mineral soils. Most planting is taking place East of the Shannon & Co. Cork

There is a need to review incentives to get farmers into forestry. Framers need to get higher returns from forestry to make it compete with agriculture.

National databases (FIPS, Soil Classification etc) will help afforestation to locate in most appropriate areas.

There will be more planting for environmental reasons eg for catchment protection especially where catchments are cross-county boundary.

As farming declines more land may become derelict which provides an opportunity for planting

Renewable Energy

Renewable energy generally and wind power in particular is expected to meet substantial increases in electricity production over the 2000-2005 period.

The rapid expansion required will be hindered by 3 types of constraint :

electricity market mechanisms

electricity network

spatial planning.

These are distinct but closely interrelated issues which cannot be considered in isolation from each other.

Peat Extraction

Bord na Mona has extensive landholdings, 80,000 Ha concentrated in the Midlands.

Nationally electricity production has been increasing and peat power currently provides about 10% of the national demand. The sources of power generation are changing, with peat playing a lesser role. The 5 existing peat power stations are being replaced with 3 modern more efficient plants that use less peat.

In line with national trends solid fuel production in the form of briquette and sod turf has fallen and will continue to do so.

Horticultural peat production is increasing and is almost all exported.

Cut away bogs

While the immediate release of cutaway bog may be limited there is no doubt that in the medium to longer term the 80,000 Ha of land that will result from peat extraction represents an asset of significant potential.

Already investigations have begun into the various after-uses, grassland, forestry and wilderness. Bord na Mona also recognise that the Midland cutaway bog has potential for the development of wind energy, this option is limited however by the current failings of wind energy strategy which forces developers to the west coast and upland areas.

Overgrazing

Should an ideal stocking rate be adopted and observed, grazing could be maintained in those areas that bogs have as yet suffered only minor damage. Limited field research conducted by Duchas has shown that recovery of vegetation cover in experimental enclosures can be dramatic, indicating that for some areas at least, removal of sheep for indefinite period could be effective in assisting natural regeneration, especially if the root mat is still intact. However, some blanket bog areas are so severely damaged that withdrawal of sheep is unlikely to lead to a restoration of bog vegetation in either the short or medium term.

Commonage framework plans, in the process of being drawn up by Duchas and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, should provide valuable ecological data for evaluating the success of REPS in future years in restoring and managing these fragile systems. Concerns have been expressed about the ecological expertise of REPS planners and the competitive pressures under which they operate the scheme. It is important that there is a clear and transparent mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the scheme. As REPS is one of the principal mechanisms to meet conservation objectives in national (NHA and European (SACs and SPAs) sites, appropriate ecological management these areas under REPS is essential.

INTENSIVE USES

Intensive agriculture

Intensive agriculture, in the form of pig and poultry production has been under going major structural change. The main thrust of reform in both these sectors has been the concentration of production into a smaller number of larger units, as well as an overall increase in actual pig and poultry numbers.

The areas of pig production have expanded into the counties of Westmeath and Longford, adjoining the traditionally strong production counties of Cavan and Monaghan which have declined.

Extractive Industries

Mining and minerals exploration are significant contributors to the national economy but by their limited distribution and fixed location they are not amenable to influence by spatial policy. Mines do create spatial policy issues themselves such transport links, location of process plant, environmental considerations etc.

Aggregate and Sand/Gravel extraction are more subject to spatial policy given their wider distribution. Generally quarries & sand/gravel pits service a 30 mile radius from the source (based on economics of transport). There is significant clustering of quarries & sand/gravel pits around the major cities, where development is concentrated. The demand for construction materials will accelerate as a result of the implementation of the NDP. In this context the ICF anticipates that the industry has sufficient capacity to meet future demand.

Given the increasing demand for building materials the environmental considerations associated with aggregate and Sand/Gravel extraction will be multiplied.

Tourism “Hot Spots”

Tourism will grow target 9% currently 6% Internationally 3-3.5% especially as leisure & wealth continue to increase.

The current trend is for greater concentration in a few areas leading to tourism congestion in some locations and limited growth in other areas. The attraction of Ireland for visitors is the beautiful scenic landscape, the distinctive cultural heritage, the unspoilt natural environment and the opportunities for relaxation and peace and quiet. The base on which our tourism is founded is being eroded and Ireland will lose its competitiveness.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Afforestation

- The period to 2010 will see the rapid expansion of forestry especially of broadleaf species. There will be significant broadleaf development on wet mineral soils that are currently in agricultural production but are marginal.
- The expanded forest estate, especially the broadleaf, will contribute to greenhouse gas abatement (carbon sequestration) but will the forest expansion be used as an excuse not to address sustainable transport?

- The anticipated urban growth will lead to greater generation of municipal sewage sludge. Normally spread on tillage land, afforested lands may offer an alternative location for sludge disposal, given the limited tillage land and its location close to urban areas.

Renewable Energy

- Policy change to the pricing regime to encourage location away from coastal and upland sites would help resolve conflict of turbine in scenic/ high amenity landscapes. Particularly as the future will be larger turbines and larger numbers of turbines in any one location.

Peat Extraction

- Peat will play a lesser role in electricity generation, how is this resolved with increasing dependency of imported natural gas and security of supply? The likelihood of carbon taxation and peat burning efficiency?

Cut away bogs

- Cutaway bogs offer a major resource for forestry, grassland, wetland/ wilderness and with policy change, wind farms.

Overgrazing

- On going CAP reform will see sheep production continue its retreat to upland areas in particularly in the West where it could conflict with SAC/ SPA designated areas, if not the actual areas, then their margins. Will the overgrazed areas expand?

Intensive agriculture

- It is probable that there will be intensive pig/poultry where dairying is currently only marginally profitable. Secondly as existing areas of intensive pig/poultry production reach capacity, in terms of slurry disposal, they are expanding into adjoining counties. How will this be reconciled with deteriorating water quality, both surface & ground?

Extractive Industries

- Demand for aggregates will multiply significantly with NDP infrastructure, construction programmes. There will be increased impact on the environment and landscape. There is no national policy or guidance on mining or quarrying.

Tourism “hot spots”

- There is tourism overcapacity in some areas so there is a need to re-distribute tourism to other areas especially away from Dublin/East coast urban based tourism. A new area based approach to tourism is proposed. The tourism “product” ie the environment, scenic amenity, natural landscapes etc is being undermined by uncontrolled development without regard to the integrated relationships of the tourism economy