

Ref: 2015S40/0111

Sent: 09 January 2015 15:34

To: Nature Conservation

Subject: Submission on Hedgerow control – review of Section 40 of the Wildlife Act [January 2015]

A Chara,

It is an irony that I cycle to a shared computer to e-mail my submission in very windy/dangerous cycling conditions (and minimal shelter from a degraded hedgerow network (with dumped material on every road as well)).

Seo libh an aighneacht/Attached is the submission (I cannot attach it, so it is included below in this e-mail

Le gach dea ghui,

Submission on Hedgerow control – review of Section 40 of the Wildlife Act [January 2015]

The hedgerow is a community asset, like a road, a lane, and church, a school, a phone box or the GAA centre. If a church has a leaking roof, it is a matter of urgent concern to have it repaired. If the heating breaks down in a school, students are sent home and the matter resolved. However, for our hedgerows, their ransacking results in impunity and the environment/landscape poorer for nature's network.

Once, Ireland was afforested over the entire island, due to the mild temperate oceanic climate and with the indigenous people living on the coastline availing of the ocean bounty and the rivers feeding into it. With the tragedy of the Battle of Kinsale onwards, the English coloniser, proceeded to rape the island of its rich forests for its armadas and military/imperial ventures to the point of where we are now with the lowest woodland cover in the EU. This shameful position is exacerbated by the destruction of what is left – our hedgerows.

As a lifelong cyclist, the destruction of the hedgerows is critical. With the exponential effects of climate change, that is, the increasingly violent and chaotic winds and exponential precipitation, personal safety for those who use the road network sustainably is now precarious. Just a year ago, the violent winds brought down trees all over the country. Trees in decline were knocked over by those climate change wind and it was a 'de facto' bonanza for chainsaws. Trees cut down WERE NOT REPLACED with new, young and healthy ones (a minimum guideline should be for each one cut down, three trees should have been planted). Many of those trees were part of the hedgerow network that supported biodiversity, food and nesting/shelter for wildlife. There were flowers, fruit, song-posts for birds and vantage points for their territorial influence and roosting sites for all of wildlife.

There is now a 'neatness' frenzy followed with cutters and flailers!!

Flailers create a particularly brutal butchery of the hedgerows. The machine operator 'does what he is told' and an occasional tree is left 'in situ', but more often of poor quality and in decline, encrusted by ivy that will capture the increasingly powerful winds that whip up and come down inevitably. Shattered or frayed branches will lead to decay and disease and reduce the vigour of the hedgerow.

Local Authorities must take charge of hedgerow management with an effective enforcement section (they have been subsumed into the planning section and thereby acquiring a secondary and ineffectual role). In addition, a concerned environment-minded person who wishes to report unnecessary hedgerow destruction, should have immunity and anonymity – after all the evidence

will be for all to see and remedial action taken by the enforcement officer. Hedgerow cutters must be on a register, with a licence to cut and only after doing a course on hedgerow management, with the expertise of assessing healthy trees to stay 'in situ' thereby encouraging the evolving biodiversity of the hedgerow (the older the hedge, the greater the biodiversity).

There is a global destruction that must be tackled at all levels and from my perspective, at local County Council level which I can depend upon towards safe sustainable travel and at the same time endorsing the biodiversity of the little that is now left in Ireland.

Go raibh mile maith agat