

Cork Wildfire Cooperative Group

Review of Section 40 of the Wildlife Act – Burning/Cutting Controls

Public Consultation Response

Friday, 09 January 2015

The Cork Wildfire Inter-Agency Group was set up in 2012 to address the level of wildfires that were occurring in the West Cork area. In recent years the amount of damage done by these fires had become unsustainable. It was decided to bring the various stakeholders together in a group in order to discuss how the burning of mountain vegetation could be done in a safe way while working within the legislative framework that currently exists.

Participating agencies to date include An Garda Síochána, Muintir Na Tíre / Community Alert, the Fire Service, National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, Cork County Council, Teagasc, the IFA, local land owners and Coillte. The emphasis is on cooperation between the landowners and the agencies as well as developing a shared understanding of the issues and opportunities and to work together in reaching these goals.

The group has achieved a significant reduction in uncontrolled burning over the last couple of years. This has largely been done through media campaigns, presentations and meetings. All of which has generated greater awareness of the risks to property, risk of fatalities, damage to wildlife, legal constraints and call out charges.

Over the last three years the group has tackled many issues and organised burning courses and presentations to farming organisations and through these experiences have been able to focus on the main issues that prevent sustainable, safe and legal burning.

A regular issue that arises during most meetings are the dates for burning. The group recognises that burning is often the only way of controlling vegetation but this can only be done when the conditions are suitable. The current closed period for the burning of vegetation by landowners is the 1st March to the 31st August.

The group would recommend that the date is extended to the end of March.

If this is done then the land owner will have a better opportunity to burn the vegetation effectively and efficiently. The group recognizes that in some cases vegetation can build up and become a serious fire hazard if it is not managed, grazed or burned regularly. It is when this material burns out of control during the summer months that real risk to life and property becomes a reality.