

Monasterevin Farmers Purchasing Group

SUBMISSION ON ARTICLE 40 WILDLIFE ACT 8/01/2015.

We are a group of 40 farmers who operate a purchasing group farming 6000 acres in Kildare and North Offaly. Our group farm beef, tillage and dairying in that order of importance and are typical of the type of farmers in the region. Our concern under the wildlife act as it is presently constructed is that it is too restricted in the time limit to trim hedges. The present time frame from 1st September to 28th February allows very little time for this type of field work as very often ground conditions are not conducive to working heavy machinery. We believe it in the interest of farmers and the environment to widen this window for cutting to begin two weeks earlier by 15th August.

There is an increasing area under winter crops particularly barley and oil seed rape which require an earlier sowing date in order to establish properly. Under the new CAP reforms 2015-2020 there are additional environmental measures requiring tillage farmers to allocate five per cent of their land area to "greening" or other winter cover, these crops need to be planted in August.

Also as more farmers adopt newer technology in grassland management to extend the grazing season there is less grass conserved and almost all land is available to trim hedges by early August. A longer grazing season means that there is more natural feed for birds for longer.

We believe that it is conducive to best environmental practice to introduce the earlier date as ground conditions can deteriorate quickly in September and often contractors are tempted to work in less than ideal conditions in order to satisfy customers. This can lead to more compaction and damage the structure of soil and less food for birds as their natural habitat is disturbed.

As custodians of the environment we have a common interest both as consumers and producers in maintaining the countryside in a sustainable manner. Bord Bia have introduced a new programme for farmers to reduce carbon footprint as it can be of economic benefit in exporting our produce in International markets. Consumers in the wider world are now demanding that their food be produced in a more sustainable manner.

Many of our members have been participants in the various REPS programmes and are now in the AEOS one and two. This involves extra measures to enhance the environment such as tree and hedge planting. Annual sowing of grain crops and green cover for the feed and protection of birds is also a requirement of these schemes. Some of our member's farms have been surveyed by representatives from Bird Watch Ireland in relation to its suitability for instillation of wind turbines and found that they contained a rich population of endangered bird species.

According to the Department of Agriculture and Food over 150,000 people in Ireland depend on farming directly and indirectly for their livelihood and farmers are very conscious of their role in sustainable food production. Other agencies will have to take this on board when making decisions which affect so many people and recognise that the 24 billion in revenue is of vital importance to the economy.

Representatives from our group are available for further discussions at a mutually agreed time.

Pat Callanan (Secretary)

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