

## Minister Hackett launches public portal for forestry licensing

Minister of State Pippa Hackett has announced the launch of a new public portal for forestry licensing. Known as the Forestry Licence Viewer (FLV), "it will provide free online access for the public to view forestry licence applications decisions," she said.

"This portal will provide members of the public with easier online access to forestry licence applications and will in time provide a repository of information on forestry licences, both applications and decisions."

Minister Hackett was speaking at the launch of the first of three phases of the FLV. "[This] will show high-level site information for all applications since 1 January 2018 and the status of those applications. Phase 2 will be released shortly and will show application documentation on applications received from the date this phase goes live, including site assessments, reports and decisions. Phase 3 is planned for early 2021 and will provide an online tool to make a submission on an application."

### **Growers' reservations**

Donal Whelan said the Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA) supported the Minister

in the amendment to the Forestry Act, the Forestry (Misc Provisions) Act 2020, but has expressed serious reservations about the extent of information disclosed in the FLV.

"While stakeholder consultation is a legal requirement of the forestry licensing process, ITGA has real concerns about the possibility of names and addresses of applicants for forestry licences being made available on such a public platform," said the ITGA technical director.

"While the townland and area may be relevant for stakeholder consultation in relation to licence applications, as has been provided heretofore, ITGA is concerned that making such personal contact information available publicly on the FLV may discourage farmers from considering afforestation."

Pat O'Sullivan, technical director of the Society of Irish Foresters, said members were extremely uneasy about making personal information available when licence applications are required for afforestation, forest road construction and felling. "This repeated intrusion in the privacy of farmers and other landowners highlights the importance of implementing Mackinnon's proposal to consider the introduction of a single consent covering afforestation, roading, management and felling," he said.