

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday 8 February 2019 16:53
To: rses
Subject: New Message (sent by contact form at Northern and Western Regional Assembly)

Name: Save Leitrim

E-Mail: [REDACTED]

Submission: The Save Leitrim group has been very active for the past year and have compiled a lot of information on the impacts of afforestation on Leitrim and in other areas around the North and West including parts of Roscommon, Mayo, West Cavan and Sligo. The reality of afforestation which has been ongoing for 40 years is most certainly leading to very significant changes in our communities, in our land use in our towns and villages and in the lives of individuals and families. The impacts are very much negative in many of the local areas across this region and this has informed our actions.

There are also very many environmental concerns, biodiversity impacts and water quality issues which this very large scale and ever increasing afforestation is having and all of this is in the context where all of the planting is happening outside of any strategic or statutory planning process for our county and these rural areas. The inadequate licensing system for plantation and felling is not allowing for the strategic consideration of the size or scale of the plantation (overall forest cover) which is happening. This is all been driven by Government incentives using taxpayer funds and which is using our land resource of our region to reduce environmental and carbon pressures in other parts of the country for many different reasons. It is not acceptable to us that in the planning process, there is no way for the local authority, the local elected representatives or for participative democracy (citizen engagement) processes to influence as to how, where or when afforestation happens. Forestry plantation causes a multi-generation land use change and it also impacts massively across the landscape and also on the traditional and established economic activities within our communities. Once this happens a process must be in place in any spatial and economic strategy for the local authorities and citizens to moderate or to influence this to reduce these impacts and currently this is not possible. The forest service licensing system for planting is site specific and takes no account of any of the social community or wider impact of overall cover. Establishing, as suggested in the draft RSES "A regional Forum to set out a framework for sustainable afforestation across the region" falls well short of the kind of action now needed to protect vulnerable rural communities in our region and in our case in County Leitrim.

Our concerns are not "Perceptions" but based on everyday realities living in, with and among almost 20% of the total area of our county covered in forestry. The spatial capacity of land in Leitrim to accommodate any further planting is now very questionable so this RSES must now clearly acknowledge this and must immediately put in place a mechanism to allow for equality in climate actions. There is a serious negative impact by forestry on farming and on the agricultural economy in the county and in the areas (other counties) affected. This is very strenuous competition through land price for the available resource of land for farming and this is in fact undermining the economy of the towns and villages of Leitrim. There are also clear demographic impacts which are most definitely being ignored by the Assembly in this draft spatial and economic strategy. Likewise the negative impacts of planting on the capacity of the traditional farmlands, on the native HNV grasslands, the upland moors and boglands in these areas to sequester carbon is not being accounted for in any way at this time or in this draft strategy. The drive to only see the sequestration of carbon through sitka / conifer plantation is leading to climate inequality for the people of our rural areas and our vulnerable communities. It is time the regional Assembly recognizes this in this strategy and insists that the existing and inherent climate and carbon contribution of these communities and areas is fully recognized and valued (paid for) and that the benefit accrues to the community and individuals therein and not just to outside investors who are largely benefiting and profiting from the plantation currently underway.

The economic value attributed to the region's forests in this draft RSES is not delivering economic impact in the

communities which are planted in by this forestry or even to the towns and villages in the hinterlands of these forests. The economic value is being released a generation later and in most cases to corporations and entities outside of the region. this is not an acceptable reason to drive on with government policy as it will result in the closing down of many more communities in Leitrim and in this region s. The Assembly and the RSES must be much more proactive in addressing this .

We will continue to work strenuously to protect farmer our communities our traditional towns and villages and their economic base and our biodiversity and environment and will continue to insist that there is now enough plantation in Leitrim and that it has reached its capacity to deliver forestry. We call on the Assembly and its members to recognize this and to act on this to protect our vulnerable communities and the future of the people who live there.