



### **Environmental Pillar Statement on the problems of ash dieback and other tree diseases**

The Environmental Pillar welcomes the latest government move to step up its ash dieback eradication measures, however it remains deeply concerned with the on-going situation. The disease has now been positively identified in 22 locations in a spread of ten counties, which is alarming.

*Chalara fraxinea* is a serious fungal disease spread via imported ash trees from Europe. This is a very serious threat to one of our native tree species, the very valuable ash. The impact of the disease on biodiversity and hydrology, as well as the supply of ash for the traditional hurley and for fuel, is likely to be considerable.

This disease has existed on the European mainland for many years and has been spreading rapidly westward over the last 10 years<sup>1</sup>. Ireland's reaction to the disease appears to be too little too late. Measures should have been taken to ensure that our stock of disease free native ash plants was increased and prioritised for planting. The arrival of *Chalara fraxinea* as a serious threat to the viability of our native ash stock as well as the emergence of other broadleaf pathogens, such as sudden oak death, can be viewed as indicators of climate change.

This puts a spotlight on our current forest policy which does not prioritise our native tree species, which are known to be effective as part of a broader climate change mitigation and adaptive strategy. This leaves our forests extremely vulnerable and weak in the face of these new threats, from pests and diseases.

The Convention on Biological Diversity to which Ireland is a signatory, also supports the view that native and natural forests are more adapted and beneficial to deal with the effects of climate change which includes increased pests and diseases<sup>2</sup>.



One positive aspect of this debacle has been the all-island cooperation. The joint move to close off the Island was made by the North South Ministerial Conference (NSMC). The Pillar in its [treecover policy document](#) recommends the development of a comprehensive All-Island tree cover agency to deal with issues such as this.

The Environmental Pillar is now calling for a comprehensive plan of action to deal with this crisis, this should aim to learn from the successful foot and mouth disease campaign and should include:

1. A comprehensive nationwide survey of ash trees in Ireland utilising all available resources including NGO's. This should take place in the spring of 2013.
2. A public information campaign shortly before spring next year to focus initially just on ash die-back disease, but subsequently to include all of the known tree diseases that are active in this hemisphere, such as sudden oak death which is also here and infecting trees.
3. A new forest policy that prioritises:
  - a) our native tree species;
  - b) support for tree nurseries to grow native trees;
  - c) the phased conversion of non-native forests to mixed species native forests; and
  - d) an education and training programme to implement this policy.

### References:

- 1 [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Pest-alert-ash-dieback-2012.pdf/\\$FILE/Pest-alert-ash-dieback-2012.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Pest-alert-ash-dieback-2012.pdf/$FILE/Pest-alert-ash-dieback-2012.pdf)
- 2 <http://www.cbd.int/climate/intro.shtml>