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PRESS RELEASE

25/14

Photos attached - Captions Embedded

28 February 2014

MINISTER OF STATE HAYES OPENS FIRE SEMINAR

Tom Hayes, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with responsibility for forestry, has opened a seminar on wildfires and forest fires held in Laois County Council County Buildings, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. The seminar, hosted by Laois County Council in conjunction with the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, addressed the issues of wildfires and forest fires in the Irish countryside, which pose a very real threat over the coming weeks and months.

Delivering the opening address, Minister Hayes noted that *“The aim of the seminar is to foster greater partnerships at local and national level in relation to wildfire management”*. Citing the losses due to fires in recent years, the Minister commented, *“It is useful to put the forestry losses into context. In 2011, it is estimated that around 1,500 hectares of forestry were lost to fire. That represents almost a quarter of the total new planted area under my Department’s afforestation schemes in that year. The cost of fire suppression in and replacement of State-owned forests is estimated to have cost over €8 million”* adding that *“That figure does not include the value of lost timber crops or the future wealth and employment that would have been generated as a result of their harvesting and processing.”*

Welcoming the seminar, the Minister said that the seminar is very timely in terms of creating awareness of the threat of fire and providing a forum for those involved in dealing with wildfires and their consequences to discuss actions to date and share knowledge and experiences. Minister Hayes added that Laois County Council and fire services who are hosting the event, have valuable experience to share in relation to the benefits of a co-operative, pro-active approach involving land owners, communities and other stakeholders to wildfire prevention and control.

Minister Hayes also commended *“the efforts of all of our emergency services, local authorities, farmers, land owners and forest owners who are working together to create awareness of the dangers and educate communities on fire prevention”*.

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