



# 2019 Annual Report

of the

## Wood Fuel Quality Assurance Scheme







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“The Wood Fuel Quality Assurance (WFQA) scheme for Ireland is an all island scheme established to increase consumer confidence in wood fuel products sold in Ireland.”

[www.wfqa.org](http://www.wfqa.org)



## 1 Foreword

The Wood Fuel Quality Assurance scheme was originally set up in 2009 by the Irish BioEnergy Association with assistance from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, NSAI, SEAI, Waterford I.T. and an oversight committee comprising of industry representatives. Over the last 10 years it has developed from concept stage, to initial certifications under a National Workshop Agreement arrangement with NSAI, until the adoption of EN 17225 as its base standard. The scheme has been used as a basis for setting up similar programmes in Spain and Italy through the Biomass Trade Centre II project and has given confidence to the marketplace here in Ireland. The scheme has given ample support to fuel suppliers in terms of education, market development, market growth, and setting up quality management systems in over 40 companies supplying woodchip, firewood, wood pellets and wood briquettes.

The members of the WFQA are very committed to promoting quality fuels, and striving to lift the standards of the entire industry, we have many examples of businesses and individuals assisting new members and potential members to ensure they raise their standards and strive to improve the overall image of the industry. The members continue to push their own limits, in 2019 they unanimously supported a proposal to regulate the moisture content of firewood for sale, setting a statutory limit of 25% moisture content and moving towards a higher standard of 20% in 2 years' time. Members know that there will be technical challenges to meet the higher standard, collectively they agree that the industry, and the individuals within must strive to move forward.

Wood fuels are an integral part of our future fuel mix to achieve our climate change targets, no other source of renewable energy can produce low grade heat and high-grade heat (industrial) with as low a carbon footprint as wood fuels. Wood is our oldest fuel – and will continue to sustain us long into the future. We must ensure that the wood we use is sustainably sourced. The WFQA has always required raw material to be sustainably sourced, and in 2020 we will adopt the requirements of RED II for sustainable sourcing.

Combustion of wood, like combustion of almost any fuel has the potential to produce other harmful emissions such as NO<sub>x</sub>, SO<sub>x</sub> and particulates. The methods to controlling these emissions, and to ensure complete combustion is largely centred around fuel quality and properly designed combustion appliances. The WFQA is an integral part of ensuring fuel quality is at its optimum to limit emissions. The introduction of regulation is fundamental to limiting emissions.

Ireland has declared a “climate emergency”, Current and future policy must underpin a robust strategy to meet the challenge ahead. Ireland is well placed to develop a strong green economy, with a solid agricultural base. Significant investment in forestry establishment over the past three decades means we now have a ready supply of raw material to produce sustainable materials, and to utilise the by-products such as wood pulp and sawdust as a sustainable renewable source of energy. We continue to support the



development of the use of wood fuels through the WFQA and consider wood fuels to be an integral part of our energy portfolio long into the future.

The WFQA has benefited greatly over the years from the dedication of its members, the work of the Irish Bioenergy Association, and support from the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine, SEAI, NSAI, Waterford I.T. and its steering committee members. The WFQA strategy 2020 – 2025 sets out the growth and development objectives of the WFQA over the next few years. This coincides with the inevitable growth of renewable sustainable fuels. The WFQA will continue to assist new and existing members to develop their supply chain, develop their production procedures and develop robust markets that understand how to utilise woodfuels to their full ability.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Noel Gavigan'.

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Noel Gavigan  
WFQA



## 2 WFQA Steering Committee

The WFQA Steering Committee is made up of a mixture of industry representation and non-voting institution representatives.

|                   |                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Eugene Hendrick   | Chair                             |
| Noel Gavigan      | IrBEA                             |
| Sean Finan        | IrBEA                             |
| Richard Hadfield  | Progressive Certification         |
| Kenny McCauley    | McCauley Woodfuels                |
| Tom Kent          | Waterford Institute of Technology |
| Gilbert McCormack | Smart Heat                        |
| Luke Heffernan    | DAFM                              |
| Lloyd Dowzer      | Leinster Pellets                  |
| Paula Kellagher   | Balcas                            |
| Nick Cotter       | Cotter Bros                       |
| Matthew Clancy    | SEAI                              |
| Denis Neary       | SEAI                              |
| PJ McLoughlin     | SEAI                              |
| Pat Murphy        | Smart Heat                        |

The WFQA held committee meetings on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May.

Noel Gavigan (IrBEA /WFQA Technical Exec) and Eugene Hendrick (WFQA Chairperson) met to discuss the ongoing development and promotion of the WFQA on the following dates:

5<sup>th</sup> February 15<sup>th</sup> March 30<sup>th</sup> April, June 5<sup>th</sup> July 23<sup>rd</sup> July 9<sup>th</sup> August and the 2<sup>nd</sup> November.



### 3 Events organised and attended in 2019

- National Manufacturing and Supply Chain Conference on the 17<sup>th</sup> January in City West. Noel Gavigan also gave a 25minute presentation on the WFQA at this conference.
- SEAI Biomass Practitioners Register Project Training Course, 4/5<sup>th</sup> February. The WFQA was promoted to boiler technology providers.
- Engineers Ireland Breakfast Briefing, 7<sup>th</sup> February – Seán Finan presented at this briefing and promoted the scheme.
- National Bioenergy Conference in Croke Park on 13<sup>th</sup> February. This annual event is the IrBEA flagship event. The WFQA stand space with three delegates (members of the WFQA) is provided free to the WFQA by IrBEA.
- Wood Heat Association Conference, 13<sup>th</sup> March, Manchester – Seán Finan presented at this conference and promoted the scheme.
- Stand at SEAI Energy Show in the RDS on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> March.
- On 12<sup>th</sup> of April, IrBEA CEO Seán Finan spoke at an event in CIT Cork organised by Seán Kelly MEP at which he promoted the WFQA in his presentation.
- Noel Gavigan spoke at the BUCANIER event in Kilkenny on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May
- Noel Gavigan spoke at the Renewable Energy Event in Bloomfield (Mullingar) on the 29<sup>th</sup> May. Delegates received a presentation on wood fuel quality, about WFQA members and the anticipated SSRH.
- 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> May – Seán Finan attended the SEAI Conferences in Galway and Cork to speak and to promote the WFQA.
- Manufacturing the Future in MedTech event in Galway on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June. The WFQA stand assisted in promoting renewable heating in the medical and pharma manufacturing industries.
- SSRH Workshop - On the 21<sup>st</sup> of June IrBEA organised and hosted a seminar for industry attended by approximately 160 delegates to mark the launch of the Support Scheme for renewable Heat. Noel Gavigan and Eugene Hendrick gave a presentation on the WFQA at the seminar. There was a WFQA stand present on the day in a prominent location manned by WFQA members.
- 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> July - Biomass Installers and Designers Register training. At this two-day training session, Seán Finan gave a presentation on the WFQA, while the main course content highlighted the importance of fuel quality for proper boiler operation and complete combustion.
- 20<sup>th</sup> August – The WFQA was promoted at the Energy in Agriculture Event in Gurteen College through having a WFQA stand at the event. Seán Finan gave a presentation on the day about “fuel switching” and presented on the key elements of the WFQA.
- On 5<sup>th</sup> September, the WFQA held a stand at the Food & Drink Expo in City West.
- On the 29<sup>th</sup> September, Noel Gavigan spoke about the WFQA and other bioenergy matters at the EcoEd4All event in the Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise.



**The WFQA in conjunction with DAFM ran a series of Technical workshops over the course of 2019, these events were as follows:**

- Technical workshop at McCauleys Wood Fuels on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 2019, there were an estimated 40 persons in attendance from the locality and further afield. The event was advertised and received coverage from the Leitrim Observer.
- 27<sup>th</sup> August Wood Energy Workshop, Laois. The workshop was followed by a site visit to Worrell Woodchip – a WFQA certified supplier.
- 29<sup>th</sup> August Wood Energy Workshop, Limerick. The workshop was followed by a site visit to Cotter Bros Firewood, a certified WFQA supplier.
- 6<sup>th</sup> November Wood Energy Workshop, Roscommon. The workshop was followed by a site visit to Woods Firewood Products, a certified WFQA supplier.
- 7<sup>th</sup> November Wood Energy Workshop, Meath. The workshop was followed by a site visit to Sherlogs Firewood, a certified WFQA supplier.

**WFQA Open Day in McCauley Woodfuels, Co. Leitrim**



**Cotter Bros Open Day**



**Woods Firewood Products Open Day**



**Sherlogs Open Day**



**Worrell Woodchip Demo**



**Training events held in conjunction with DAFM**





## 4 Advertising & Promotion

### 4.1 Print Articles where WFQA was mentioned

In 2019, the WFQA engaged in media monitoring to capture mentions of the WFQA in all print media, the WFQA has had an eventful year in the media with 14 mentions in print articles. The Total Advertising Value Equivalent coming to over €20,000. The table below highlights the coverage received.

| Date       | Headline  | Publication                         |
|------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 21/12/2019 | Gavigan hits back at suggested banning of renewable wood fuel             | Irish Farmers Journal               |
| 05/11/2019 | Workshop on producing quality wood-fuel for renewable heat                | Roscommon Herald                    |
| 01/10/2019 | Will Biomass Heating be Beneficial for Your Business or Farm?             | Forest and Industry Review magazine |
| 05/09/2019 | Heating and Eating? All sorted  | Mallow Star                         |
| 24/08/2019 | Future is Bright  | Irish Examiner Weekend              |
| 14/08/2019 | Cotter Brothers take the lead in climate control and organic farming.     | Weekly Observer                     |
| 19/06/2019 | Support scheme for renewable heat is a real gamechanger for sector        | Leitrim Observer                    |
| 22/05/2019 | Irish Bioenergy Associations members attend Mohill Event                  | Leitrim Observer                    |
| 22/05/2019 | “Marking a Successful Open Afternoon at McCauley Wood Fuels Ltd”          | Leitrim Observer                    |
| 15/05/2019 | Open day at McCauley Wood Fuel Ltd, Mohill                                | Leitrim Observer                    |
| 01/05/2019 | Open afternoon at McCauley Wood Fuels                                     | Leitrim Observer                    |
| 20/04/2019 | Meeting reforestation, marketing and wood energy challenges in Co Leitrim | Irish Farmers Journal               |
| 10/04/2019 | Big crowds attend forestry field day event in Mohill                      | Leitrim Observer                    |
| 30/03/2019 | Navan Open Day on “Continuous Cover” Forestry System                      | Meath Chronicle                     |

In addition to print articles, a further 8 online articles were published by online media organisations such as Agriland etc.



## 4.2 Website

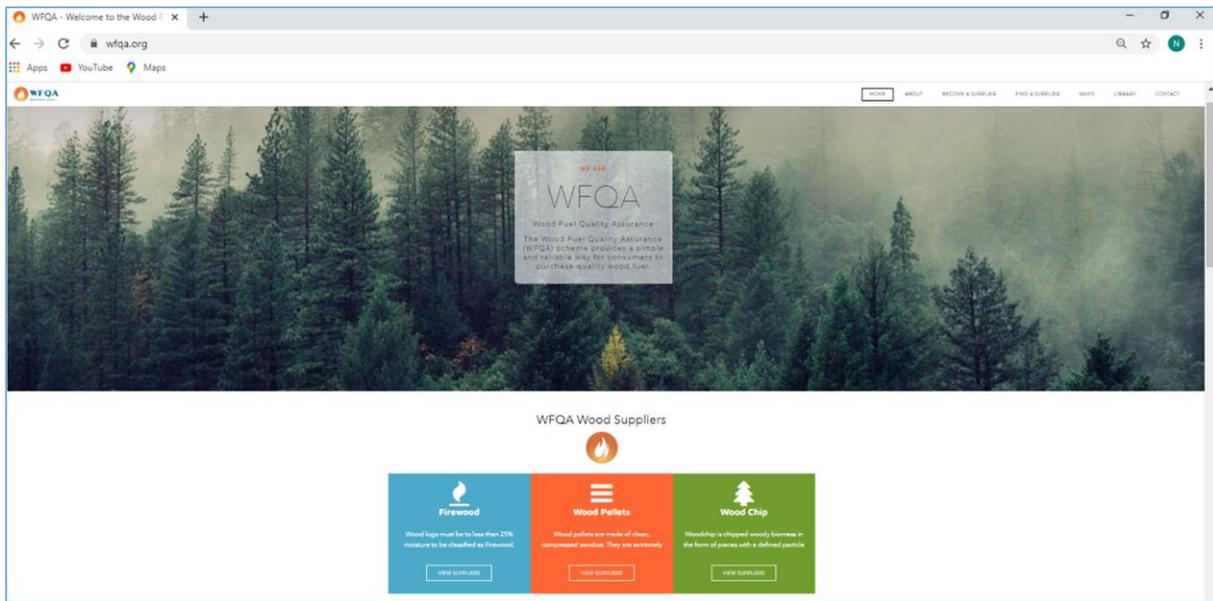
The website was regularly updated throughout the year with information on events and consumer information. We had planned to conduct a major review of the existing website in 2019 but having considered many options it was decided to develop a full new website.

The new website, developed in November and December 2019, has enhanced features leading to a better user experience, the new website features are:

1. Map tool to allow consumers locate suppliers close to them.
2. New layout allowing faster selection of options.
3. Design layout focused more for consumers rather than prospective suppliers. The website is designed to draw in consumers and to be more user friendly to them.
4. Layout suitability for small screens such as phones and iPad. Our data analytics shows that a strong majority of visitors to our site are finding it using phones and i-pads rather than on laptops or desktop computers.
5. The News feed is setup to facilitate faster and more efficient uploading of content.
6. The site still contains links to useful websites such as the DAFM Forest Service, Coford Connects and SEAI.



[www.wfqa.org](http://www.wfqa.org) New WFQA Website



Website Map tool allowing consumers locate suppliers near to them





### 4.3 Twitter

The WFQA twitter handle @woodfueQA has just under 300 followers. We use the twitter account to promote the WFQA. To assist the management of the twitter account we have increased the number of administrators. The twitter account is now administrated by Noel Gavigan, Teresa O'Brien and Pat Murphy, which has facilitated much greater promotion of the WFQA and its events.



### 4.4 Google advertising

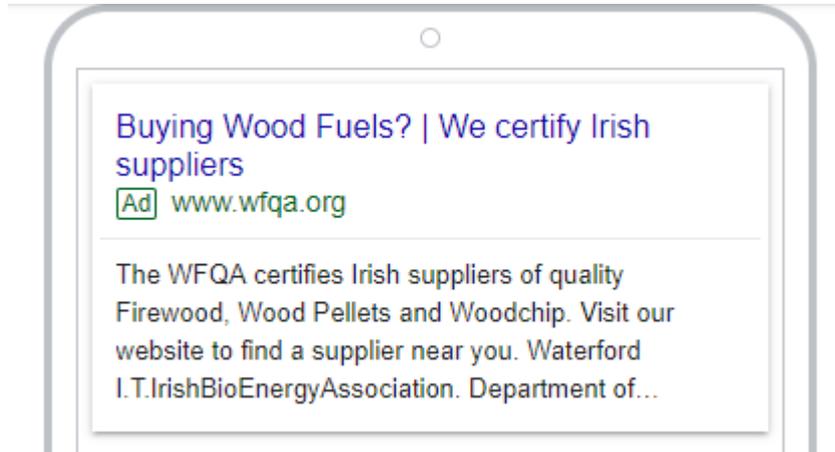
The WFQA set up a Google advertising campaign in late 2018. This has proven successful in driving consumers to the wfqa.org website. In 2019, the advertisement was shown 838,413 times. A total of 2,882 people followed through to the WFQA website averaging at €0.40 per click.

Our strategy has been to reduce advertising during the off season for firewood and ramp back up for the heating season starting in September each year. This has ensured advertising revenue is most appropriately spent during the most active sales and usage months.

The advertisement type is simple, yet effective. Using Google Analytics, we were able to determine which advertisement type gathered most interest, having initially trialled 6 different iterations we found that the simple message of “Buying Wood fuels? – We Certify Irish Suppliers” proved most popular.



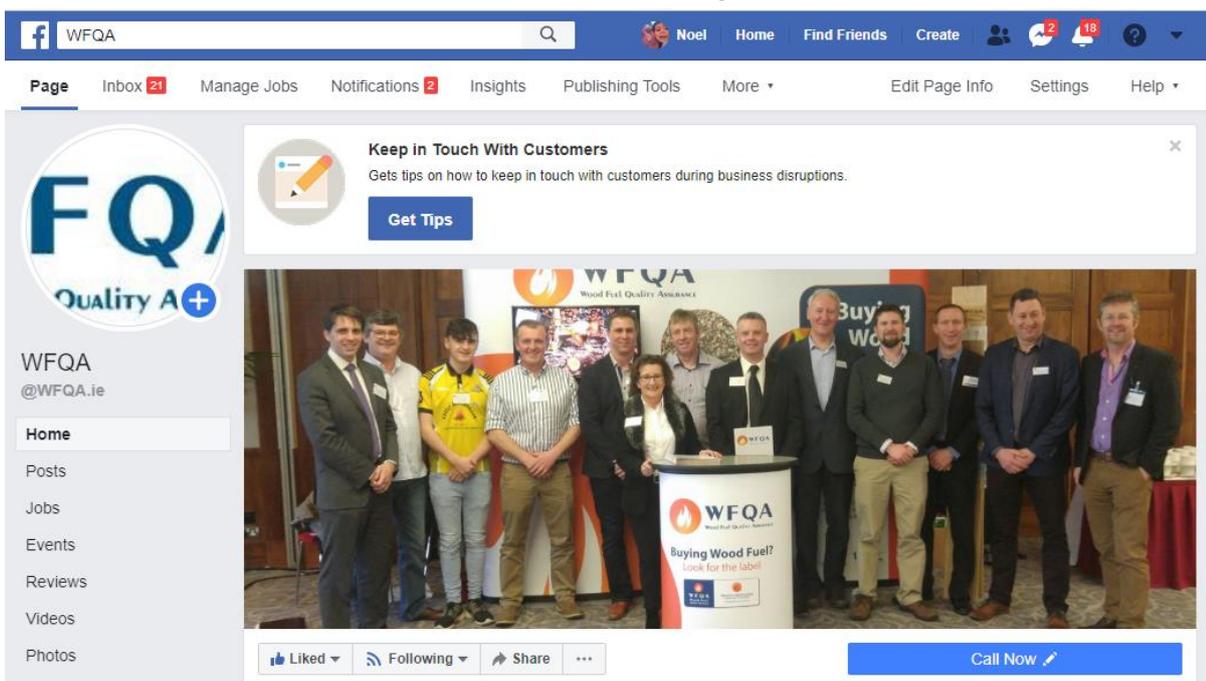
### Google Advert that proved most effective



### 4.5 Facebook

The WFQA Facebook page [https://www.facebook.com/WFQA.ie/?epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/WFQA.ie/?epa=SEARCH_BOX) is administered by Noel Gavigan, Teresa O'Brien and Pat Murphy. It is used to promote WFQA events, new members and information for consumers.

### WFQA Facebook Page





## 5 Regulation of Firewood for Sale

At the Committee meeting in January 2019 it was agreed that a proposal be developed and presented through IrBEA to DCCAE that all firewood should be controlled under the smokeless fuel legislation, specifically the WFQA would recommend that all firewood offered for sale must be in compliance with ISO 17225-5 A1 or A2 standard, which specifies a maximum moisture content of 25%. Noel Gavigan and Eugene Hendrick developed a proposal and presented it to the IrBEA Management Committee for approval. The IrBEA Management Executive Committee approved the proposal. A briefing document was prepared, and a meeting was set up with DCCAE.

Noel Gavigan attended the Con Air Launch on the 15<sup>th</sup> February'19 and was able to articulate the importance of quality fuel to the assembled participants. This resulted in Noel Gavigan opening discussions with DCCAE who were in attendance at the workshop about the proposal.

16 April'19 – Noel Gavigan, Sean Finan and Eugene Hendrick meet with Dept of Environment in Custom House on air emissions and wood fuels. This opened the discussions with DCCAE about placing a statutory limit on the moisture content of firewood.

Throughout the year ongoing progress was made in developing documentation, gathering research and meeting with officials on this matter.

An official proposal document was drafted and presented to the Department of Environment in October 2019.

During the many discussions around the banning of “smoky coal” that took place on national media and in Dail Committee hearings the debate often included the banning of firewood. Due to a concerted effort by IrBEA, the WFQA and its members the narrative was successfully changed from the banning of all wood fuels to the banning of wet firewood – in line with our proposal.

## 6 The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat

The Opening of the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) by SEAI in June has greatly benefited the wood fuel industry, many companies put forward plans to install biomass boilers to meet their heating demands.

One of the criteria around the SSRH is that fuels supplied must meet the correct standards, this has resulted in a surge in applications to join the WFQA.

The WFQA offers advice to both consumers and suppliers in terms of the SSRH, matching the correct fuel to each boiler is critical to ensure air emission criteria are met and to ensure compliance with the SSRH.



## 7 Certifications and Members

The WFQA scheme received its annual oversight audit from Progressive Certification in February 2019. There were no matters outstanding and the WFQA processes passed without difficulty.

New membership grew considerably during the year, by years end there were 21 certified members and a further 8 in advanced stages of earning certification.

Growth in demand for woodchip was largely based on demand from SSRH boilers. Growth from firewood suppliers largely centred around our proposals to regulate the sale of firewood, and due to the industry maturing and seeking greater recognition for professionalism.

The members of the WFQA are its driving force. They regularly support the WFQA by helping to man the trade stand at events, assist in developing promotional material, and assist in developing the standards for the WFQA. In August 2019, a member survey was carried out in addition to direct member consultations. This input was crucial in developing a 5-year strategy for the WFQA from 2020-2025

**WFQA Certificate Presentations at the DAFM Stand, National Ploughing Championships Sept '19**





## 8 WFQA Strategy Document 2020-2025

In 2019, the WFQA embarked on developing a five-year strategy which sets out a strategic roadmap on how to develop the WFQA up to 2025 and beyond. The process was headed by IrBEA CEO Seán Finan with assistance from WFQA Chair Eugene Hendrick and WFQA auditor and promoter Noel Gavigan. Crucially, the membership of the WFQA were consulted early on through various methods such as a questionnaire and direct consultation. The resulting document will focus all stakeholders on what's required to further grow and develop the WFQA in the coming years.

