



Irish Bioenergy Association (IrBEA)

Wood Fuel Quality Assurance Scheme  
(WFQA)

Strategy for Growth and Development  
2020 – 2025

March 2020



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## 1 Foreword

### 1.1 WFQA Chairman's Foreword

This strategy for the growth and development of WFQA follows stakeholder input and the deliberations of the secretariat. The intention is to set a pathway for WFQA to continue to expand its membership, support the increased use of high-quality wood fuels, and to influence public policy regarding the regulation of wood fuel for sale.

Since the establishment of WFQA over a decade ago the use of wood fuels, firewood, woodchip and pellets has greatly expanded, and a range of high performing stoves and boilers have come to market. The Eco-design Directive has begun to impact on boiler efficiency and emissions, and this will be followed by new regulations for domestic stoves coming into operation from 2022. The SSRH scheme has also driven a need for quality wood fuels, especially woodchip.

A number of other developments, such as the sustainability criteria for wood fuels called up in the Renewable Energy Directive and due for enactment from 2021, and of course issues surrounding air quality, entail continued engagement by IrBEA and WFQA with a number of government departments and agencies. This work requires resources which can be met through the secretariat and the WFQA membership. Funding is also an essential requirement, in order to develop cogent and convincing cases based on hard evidence. We also need to liaise closely with the Domestic Heating WG of Bioenergy Europe, who are actively engaging in air quality issues with the European Commission and other agencies. Again, this vital process needs continuous engagement and input by the secretariat.

Expanding the use of quality and sustainable wood fuels is part of EU policy and has been identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as an essential mitigation measure to control global heating. There are however significant challenges facing wood fuel use, ranging from air quality to questioning of the climate benefits of wood combustion. In the Irish context IrBEA is well placed to lobby and advocate on policy issues on behalf of WFQA members. I am confident that ownership and implementation of this strategy will enable us to fully address those challenges and drive forward our sector for the coming five-year period.

Yours sincerely,

*Eugene Hendrick*

Chair of the WFQA Steering Committee

## 1.2 [IrBEA CEO's Foreword](#)

I'm delighted to present the strategy for the future growth and development of the Wood Fuel Quality Assurance Scheme (WFQA). This document has been compiled following consultation with WFQA members and a range of stakeholders. The WFQA scheme is an integral and very important part of the Irish Bioenergy Association (IrBEA) organisation. IrBEA as the administrator of the scheme also lobbies and advocate on behalf of the WFQA members on issues affecting their businesses and sector. The role of the WFQA's is non-political and is to certify wood fuel suppliers and the quality of the wood fuels they produce. Particulate emissions from wet wood fuels is the current topical policy item which IrBEA is championing on behalf of the WFQA membership.

This strategic plan sets out the vision, mission, values, goals, direction, objectives and targets of the WFQA over the next 5 years. There will be many opportunities and challenges ahead for the WFQA during this time. Full implementation of the goals and actions set out in this strategy, will equip the WFQA with the resilience and resources necessary to meet such opportunities and indeed challenges, to deliver for its members.

Within the current political landscape, climate change and decarbonisation are very topical issues. The role of wood fuels as a solution to reducing both GHG emissions and use of fossil fuels in both domestic and commercial installations presents an exciting opportunity for WFQA members to grow the fuel market share for quality wood fuels in the form of firewood, wood chips or wood pellets. The industry contribution towards employment and the generation of economic activity in rural Ireland is significant and will grow rapidly over the next few years driven by the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) and increasing domestic demand.

Quality wood fuels are very important but only one component of four critical elements for an efficient and environmentally sustainable heating systems. The right fuel must be used in the right appliance with the right consumer practices with proper and regular appliance maintenance.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the WFQA committee and WFQA members who took and contributed to the development of this strategic plan. I look forward to seeing the WFQA continue to develop and evolve through the implementation of this strategic plan over the coming years.

Yours sincerely,

*Seán Finan*

CEO of the Irish Bioenergy Association (IrBEA)

## 2 Background to the Wood Fuel Quality Assurance Scheme

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. The scheme is administered by the Irish Bioenergy Association and governed by a steering committee comprising of members of the scheme and representatives of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine and SEAI. As the WFQA grows, members will provide consumers with a greater degree of confidence in secure and sustainable supply of quality wood fuel products around Ireland.

## 3 Mission, Vision, Values

This document clearly sets out the mission, vision and values of the WFQA.

### 3.1 Our Mission Statement

WFQA is an independently audited wood fuel quality scheme which covers all the main biomass fuels. The WFQA mission to certify wood fuel suppliers to ensure the wood fuel products they place on the market comply with ISO 17225 Solid biofuels — Fuel specifications and classes, and other relevant standards and regulations.

### 3.2 Our Vision Statement

To sustain and grow the market for sustainably produced wood fuels for the domestic and commercial market in the context of climate change mitigation through displacement of fossil fuels and increased use of renewable and sustainable fuels.

### 3.3 Our Values

Our values are:

- Environmental integrity and protection.
- Sustainable forest management.
- Honesty and transparency in consumer protection.
- Fostering enterprise and development in the wood fuel sector.
- Openness to change.

## 4 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

This section clearly sets out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the WFQA.

### 4.1 Strengths

- Existing active membership.
- Main wood fuel types part of the scheme.
- Strong and committed executive and committee with good technical knowledge.
- Wood Fuels produce domestic and commercial heating with the lowest life cycle greenhouse gas emissions.
- Buy in from regulatory authorities and state agencies such as the SEAI, DAFM, EPA, DCCAE, for WFQA called-up in Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH).
- Strong, and increasingly well-recognised Logo.
- Good interaction, engagement and sharing of information and knowledge transfer between members.
- Good linkages with Bioenergy Europe Domestic Heating Working Group which engages with the European Commission and other agencies on wood fuel use and its expansion.

### 4.2 Weaknesses

- Small membership.
- More participation from members required in steering committee.
- No statutory requirement for quality wood fuel use, lessening incentive to membership.
- Lack of public and political awareness on the difference in wet and dry wood fuels in terms of energy output and emissions.
- Lack of public knowledge and brand recognition of the scheme.
- Improper combustion of wood fuels producing harmful emissions.

### 4.3 Opportunities

- To grow membership.
- Increased interest from wood fuel suppliers due to developments in the SSRH
- Increased interest from wood fuel suppliers due to the potential for regulation of firewood.



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Wood Fuel Quality Assurance



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- Possible link to certification of sustainability of wood fuels under recast Renewable Energy Directive (RED II).
- Possible new funding instruments at national level with wood fuel window.
- Legal restriction of wet firewood sale and increasing public awareness of importance of air quality.
- Move towards renewable energy.
- Locally sourced fuels.
- Increase awareness of needs for sustainable wood fuels.
- Displacement of uncertified and unsuitable wood fuels.
- Carbon tax.
- Ongoing development of wood combustion technologies and of new wood-based fuels.
- Eco-design regulations on boilers (1 January 2020) and stoves (1 January 2022) which require quality wood fuels for efficient and low emission operation.
- Climate Action Plan and related measures.
- Expansion of the wood fuel market and increasing consumer awareness.

#### 4.4 Threats

- Low cost and unregulated producers selling poor quality wood fuels.
- Emissions regulations and control.
- Non-certified fuel in the marketplace.
- Housing regulations and lack of understanding of benefits of wood-based fuel combustion systems and Lack of recognition of biomass systems in current retrofit scheme.
- Particulate emissions from wet wood fuels.

## 5 Strategic Risks

This section sets out the strategic risks facing the WFQA.

- Regulatory Risk – If the government does not introduce regulation on the moisture content of wood fuels for sale and supply there will be no distinguishing between wet and dry wood fuels.
- Scheme Credibility – The more members the scheme has the more credibility the label will have with policy makers, consumers and potential non-members. Without a significant growth in members the potential of the scheme will not be fully realised.
- Environmental acceptance of wood fuels.
- Wood fuel sustainability certification not fully realised.
- Building regulations effectively precluding the use of wood fuels.

## 6 Strategic Goals and associated objectives

The strategic goals for the WFQA stem from the mission and vision and from a consideration of the strength, opportunities, weaknesses and risks which the scheme faces. The goals of the organisation are aimed at fulfilling the mission, achieving the vision, capitalising on the strengths and opportunities and guarding against the risks and weaknesses.

- Goal No 1: Grow the market for wood fuel generally, and particularly Increase market capture using WFQA certified high-quality wood fuels.
- Goal No 2: Optimise use of wood fuel resource through use in energy efficient applications such as Eco-design stoves, and CHP.
- Goal No 3: Support rural development through the generation of local sustainable employment.
- Goal No 4: Increase the knowledge and awareness of suppliers and consumers on the difference between poor quality non-certified wood fuel and quality assured certified wood fuel, good practice in operation and maintenance of appliances.
- Goal No 5: Increase the use of locally produced, sustainable wood fuels.
- Goal No 6: Development of supply chains for wood fuels.

## 7 Strategic Actions

The following list of strategic actions will be undertaken to achieve the goals and objectives set out above. Many of the actions may involve a review of the current structures and practices of the WFQA but such reviews are necessary. The actions are in not in any order.



- Action 1: Targeted engagement with wood fuel suppliers to encourage WFQA membership through market intelligence and DAFM/WFQA wood energy courses.
- Action No 2: Lobby through IrBEA for the introduction of regulation of the moisture content of firewood for sale in Ireland.
- Action No 3: Work with COFORD, SEAI and stakeholders on compliance with the certification of the of the RED II sustainability criteria.
- Action No 4: Engage with the multiples to raise awareness of WFQA and specification to it.
- Action No 5: Specific engagement with regulatory authorities and campaigns around the 20% moisture content and the difference in wet and dry wood fuels in terms of particulate emissions and energy output.
- Action No 6: Continual engagement campaign with wood fuel suppliers and consumers through the WFQA website and information materials distributed through many difference PR, Media and Communication mediums.
- Action No 7: Improve the awareness of the logo and label at all levels.
- Action No 8: Develop and implement an annual promotional plan.
- Action No 9: Provide guidance to members seeking to identify potential cost savings.
- Action No 10: Continued engagement of WFQA through IrBEA with Bioenergy Europe and other European bodies to contribute to policy development at a European level.

## 8 Strategic Targets.

New membership Target for the WFQA

2020 – 30 members.

2021 – 35 members.

2022 – 40 members.

2023 – 45 members.

2024 – 50 members.

## 9 Conclusions

This strategy will expand and grow the market for high quality, sustainable wood fuels through the WFQA scheme. It is being implemented in the context of increasing scrutiny of wood fuels and their role and need to be to agile and responsive to society’s demands for good air quality and tackling climate change. It needs the commitment of the WFQA membership, and a properly resourced IrBEA staff to make the strategy work, and fully engage across the range of actions outlined. As we look to the future, and the evolution of biofuels such as thermally modified wood and gas offtakes, and the prospect of biorefining and carbon capture and storage, there will be an increasing need for chain of custody, sustainability and product certification across the range of biofuels. WFQA has the potential to address many of



those areas, but only based on a strong track record and growing its core area. This strategy if successfully implemented will enable those developments.