

Brussels, 28th April 2015

STRATEGIC AGENDA OF THE CIVIL DIALOGUE GROUP ON FORESTRY AND CORK FOR 2015-2022

The Civil Dialogue Group (CDG) on Forestry and Cork builds on the work and structures of the former Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork, although there are new members in the CDG.

The strategic agenda for 2015-2022 will provide guidance and focus for the work of the CDG in addressing current and emerging subjects related to EU relevant policies for the sector. The strategic agenda shall be valid for 7 years with the possibility to revise it every 2 years, taking policy developments and the needs of the sector into account.

One of the main objectives of the CDG is to enhance its advisory role and facilitate better communication and coordination between the Commission services and relevant stakeholders as well as between the CDG, the Standing Forestry Committee (SFC) and other relevant Commission expert groups. The key task of the CDG is to reflect on the implementation of various EU policies concerning forests on the ground and to provide a broad range of stakeholder perspectives.

Significant societal and political changes are influencing the way EU society and policy makers look at forests and forestry. Horizontal/sectorial policies, such as energy, climate, environment, industry and trade policies, increasingly influence and contribute to forest policy and management at national level and on the ground.

The new EU Forest Strategy is expected to be a reference point, enabling better policy coherence and coordination at EU level. The CDG will be a key player in the further implementation of the EUFS in the years to come. The CDG will also regularly address the implementation and action plan in accordance with other forest relevant policies and their developments.

In addition, the work of the group should follow the Commission working programme, mainly President Juncker's Agenda for Growth and Jobs and investment plan.

The discussions of the CDG should be aligned with the discussions and proposals of the DG ENTR expert group on forest-based industries and its action plan, with the expert group on bio-based products, with the DG RTD work within the Bioeconomy Panel and with the DG Envi Co-ordination Group for Biodiversity and Nature.

The European Forest Policy framework and topics to be addressed by the CDG

1. New EU Forest Strategy

To ensure stakeholder participation in the process, the CDG will be involved in the implementation of the new forest strategy and its multi-annual implementation plan.

The CDG will base its discussion on the EUFS guiding principles and address the EUFS 2020 objectives as well as the various strategic orientations and their implementation through the multi-annual action plan.

Specific focus will be given to:

- The development and implementation of SFM criteria.

- The links between the EUFS and other policy frameworks such as the Biodiversity Strategy, the Bioeconomy Strategy, the EU 2030 Climate and Energy Package and the Blueprint for the EU forest-based industries.
- The fostering of coordination and communication.

2. The new Rural Development policy for 2014-2020

The rural development policy provides the main financial instruments for forestry in EU. The importance of forests, the ecosystem services they offer and the forest sector and the competitiveness of forestry should be given an adequate role in the implementation of the rural development measures. The new RDP offers a broad set of measures. The CDG will address the uptake of measures and funds during the next period. This requires close communication between CDG members and national/regional authorities and the Commission, as well as regular updates from DG Agri on the implementation of the measures which are relevant to the sector.

3. Biodiversity Strategy and Natura 2000

The EU Biodiversity Strategy is the main instrument to coordinate and facilitate various environmental related actions and initiatives. It contains 6 mutually supportive and inter-dependent targets contributing to the headline objective of halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services by 2020, and to restore them as far as possible.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020 highlights the importance of forests (management) in various contexts in order to achieve the strategy's specific targets, as well as the commitments made in the CBD.

In particular, the CDG will address the following initiatives:

- Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services (MAES)
- No Net Loss (NNL)
- Target 2: Green Infrastructure and 15% restoration of degraded ecosystems
- Better targeting of Rural Development funds to biodiversity conservation

Natura 2000 and forests

More than half of all Natura 2000 sites are located in forests. The Commission is currently reassessing the management of Natura 2000 sites (bio-geographical seminars) and developing new guidelines on the management of forest under Natura 2000.

The CDG will in particular address the new guidance document on Natura 2000 and forests and the implementation and funding of Natura 2000.

Furthermore, the CDG will look into the possibilities of payments for forest ecosystem services that compromise market opportunities as well as compensation payments for measures to be implemented.

4. The bioeconomy – challenges and opportunities for society

The Civil Dialogue Group would like to draw attention to the contribution of the EU forest sector to society and especially the role this sector could play in the bioeconomy. The CDG would like to contribute to the implementation of the EU bioeconomy strategy and monitor its implementation together with the Bioeconomy Panel, the Standing Committee on Agriculture Research (SCAR), the expert group on bio-based products, EIP Agri, EIP Raw-materials (incl. ECAMOB), and the expert group on Renewable Raw Materials.

In particular, the CDG should be involved in all discussions related to the production of forest biomass in order to ensure that the three pillars of sustainability are acknowledged and put into practice.

In addition, the CDG's discussion on the bioeconomy should be aligned with the discussions of the DG ENTR expert group on forest-based industries and their action plan.

The following topics which pertain to the bioeconomy will be addressed:

- Biomass production and supply and their sustainability
- Demand for woody biomass by different sectors
- Access to finance and investments
- Access to markets and new products

Furthermore, the CDG aims to open a debate with the COM regarding the EU measures that are needed to enhance the use of wood for construction.

5. 2030- Climate and energy package

On 22nd January 2014, the Commission presented its proposal for new pillars of the EU framework on climate and energy towards 2030 in its Climate and Energy Framework Communication. The main proposals included: a reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 40%; an EU-wide binding target for renewable energy of at least 27%; and renewed, unspecified, ambitions for energy efficiency policies. The communication also includes the aim that agriculture, land use, land use change and forestry should be included in the 2030 reduction target.

The CDG should discuss the challenges and opportunities of the forest sector in the context of this package, with particular focus on carbon storage and sequestration as well as substitution effects.

Furthermore, it will address the necessary measures to develop and/or implement at EU level to enhance the contribution of the forest sector to climate change mitigation.

6. Climate change adaptation and forest protection

The various effects of climate change on forests, such as changing environmental conditions, storms and fires, are already making their mark and will be felt throughout Europe, at varying levels of intensity. Therefore the prevention of, adaptation to and mitigation of climate change are vital to sustainable forest management. The EU provides several support measures to combat forest fires, pest and diseases and to help adapt to increasing risks of storm damages as well as to maintain resilient forest ecosystems.

In this context the CDG will debate the effectiveness of RDP measures as well as the health risk controlling mechanisms.

7. Implementation of the EU Timber Regulation

The implementation of the EU Timber Regulation started in March 2013. The CDG should actively participate in the follow-up and discussions on implementation experiences on the ground with the Commission. The CDG should be a key platform to provide input about the evaluation of first two years of implementation, scheduled for 2015.

8. Follow-up of FOREST EUROPE and UNFF global and regional processes

Having regional and global processes and platforms for Member States and stakeholders to discuss forestry-related issues are essential to improve understanding of sustainable forest management and the tools needed to enhance it.

The CDG should follow-up on the work and developments of these processes and provide input to the Commission for coordinated EU contributions and ensure that the views of stakeholders are taken into account.

9. Communication and Promotion

The multifunctional role played by forests is crucial for the development of rural areas. The CDG would like to stress the need for improved communication between the forest sector and the rest of society. This also applies to communication with policy makers at different levels.

The CDG together with the Commission and SFC should aim for more regular and concrete joint communication action, such as joint communication campaigns.
