

Brussels,
agri.ddg3.i.4(2020)241830

FINAL MINUTES

Meeting of the Civil Dialogue Group Forestry and Cork 8 November 2019

Chair: Mr **Antonio Paula Soares** (CEPF)

Organisations present: All Organisations were present, except European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT).

1. Approval of the agenda and elections of the Chairmanship

The Chair asked the members to approve the minutes of the previous meeting and the agenda. The minutes were approved. The agenda was approved.

Mr **Pierre Bascou**, Director at the European Commission, DG AGRI, gave a welcoming speech in which he stressed the importance of a new policy framework for forests. Moreover, Mr Bascou noted that forests and the forest-based sector play an important role in achieving the objectives of the upcoming European Green Deal. He also mentioned that a more important role given to forests means a more important role for the Civil Dialogue Group on Forestry and Cork.

After the welcoming speech, the Commission (DG AGRI) introduced the procedure of election of the Chairmanship. It announced that three applications had been received: two for the positions of Vice-Chairs and one for the position of the Chair.

The candidates presented themselves prior to the vote. Mr **Antonio Paula Soares** (CEPF) was elected as Chairman of the group whereas Mr **Mårten Larsson** (CEPI) and Mrs **Kelsey Perlman** (EEB) were elected as Vice-Chairs.

2. Nature of the meeting

The meeting was non-public.

3. List of points discussed

3.1. State of play of Commission work on MAES (Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services)

JRC made a presentation that is available on CIRCABC.

Questions

EUSTAFOR asked where the gaps are as it comes to the results of the MAES exercise. It also asked about the interpretation of the information provided in result of reporting under the Article 17 of the Habitats Directive as it comes to forests' condition. In addition, it requested how MAES is interlinked with the international processes such as the ones under FAO and Forest Europe.

ELO asked if the surface area vary over time and if it does what are the reasons behind.

EEB asked about policy relevant indicators and division of these and other indicators. It also asked if the aim is to continue the assessment afterwards.

Answers from JRC

JRC noted that an essential point is to measure whether we are reaching the targets set in the Biodiversity Strategy in key ecosystems. The MAES condition assessment aims at showing, via different quantitative indicators, what is the status and trends (e.g. degradation, no change, improvement) of forest (and other) ecosystems. In addition, MAES aims at providing maps showing trends towards degradation in specific regions. It was highlighted that the information of National Forest Inventories (NFI) is fundamental and that they are in contact with Forest Europe and UNECE to get data on e.g. deadwood and forest area. As many of the indicators are not a part of these two data providers, MAES also uses mainstream data from Copernicus, EMEP, EEA, JRC, ICP, Art. 17, etc. The idea is to complement and use the data on biodiversity and ecosystem condition within a common framework. JRC said that consistency is key, and that they choose relevant indicators from different state-of-art sources. JRC also mentioned the MAES INCA project to streamline statistical outputs (accounting) of MAES. It was also noted that the Article 17 of the Habitats Directive has a fundamental role in MAES, and the aim is to complement it with other parameters.

Regarding the question on surface area, JRC mentioned that the information on forest area from the NFIs was adopted in MAES assessment. In addition, JRC mentioned that the information provided under the Article 17 is not necessarily harmonised throughout the EU Member States. Therefore, the MAES assessment provides some improvements regarding this point.

JRC said that the MAES assessment relies, among other sources, in the data provided by the NFIs, and that maps are important as they provide the location of pressures based on indicators. The aim is that MAES covers a variety of ecosystems. There are several (around 15) indicators related to climate pressures affecting condition (e.g. on temperatures, drought, extreme events) and these are considered a relevant piece of information on ecosystem condition. Policy-relevant indicators are important and are represented in the MAES assessment, it was noted as well that other indicators such as the one on productivity have been collected and included. A complete list of indicators is available in the 5th MAES report¹.

3.2. Evaluation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030

The European Commission made a presentation that is available on CIRCABC.

¹https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/ecosystem_assessment/pdf/5th%20MAES%20report.pdf

Questions

ELO noted that Lithuania will be one of the countries which will be assessed. It told that the bird index is one of the tools to be used and reminded about some reasons behind the decline of certain bird species due to e.g. hunting in Africa. It stressed that these kinds of drivers have nothing to do with forest management.

Birdlife said it is willing to share more information about the declining bird populations due to agriculture. It highlighted that the current Biodiversity Strategy has failed and a stronger tool with binding legislations is needed in order to stop the biodiversity loss.

WWF wondered how it is possible that the European Commission President-elect, Mrs von der Leyen has announced that a new strategy will be published prior having the results of the evaluation of the current strategy.

COPA also asked if it was too early to propose a new framework as the evaluation is not yet concluded. It also questioned the relevance of bird indicator as it comes to climate change.

CEPI agreed with COPA and WWF on the timetable of evaluation and new strategy. It asked if the public consultation would be on the evaluation or on the new strategy announced to be a part of the European Green Deal.

CEPF supported the comments of the participants of the meeting on timing of evaluation and new strategy. It also addressed the importance of the evaluation that should consider the long-term nature of forests. It asked about the links to climate and bioeconomy and asked how the Commission will support the multifunctionality of European forests. It also asked how the upcoming conference will link to the “our forests our future” conference of the Commission held in spring 2019.

COPA expressed its interest to cooperate and asked what the link between the Biodiversity Strategy and the EU Forest Strategy is.

ELO asked how to ensure that more dynamic approach is taken as it comes to different protection mechanism.

ELO also noted that in future more focus should be put on climate change and problems caused by e.g. bark beetles. It noted that in occurrence of large-scale damages, reforestation requires lots of money and this money is missing. In addition, currently the wood markets are overloaded and in future there will be lack of wood. Due to these devastating consequences all ecosystem services provided by forests are put at risk. It is important to be able to use tree species in future that are more resilient to the changing climate conditions.

COPA stressed on the importance of having enough time between the evaluation and the new strategy. It reminded that the forest owners will be impacted by the policy and therefore it is crucial to have enough time to reflect. It asked how the evaluation results will be presented during the Green Week and how it is possible to get involved.

WWF asked if the new strategy will differ from the current one and wished that the new strategy would be more binding.

CEPF wished to see more focus on multifunctional role of forests and sustainable forest management. It noted that there was a gap between nature protection in which financial

support is mainly targeted and managed forests. However, the results of the evaluation cover all forests.

COPA supported the comment of ELO on bark beetles. In addition, it stressed the importance of benefits of the bioeconomy especially as it comes to substituting fossil-based materials and energy. A reference was made to a just published study in Austria. It wished that this aspect would be promoted in the course of the upcoming conference.

Answers of the European Commission

Regarding the question on the bird index, the Commission noted that the question on migratory corridors is crucial. It noted that the status of the forest birds is improving from 2005, despite a net worsening between 1990 and 2017, whereas farmland birds are declining and common birds stabilising. It also noted that the rarest species are in decline.

The Commission mentioned that they have enough data, such as information about MAES, the upcoming public consultation, and the mid-term biodiversity strategy evaluation, to base the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. However, it is challenging that the results of the evaluation will be published after the publication of the new biodiversity policy. The Commission foresees concrete measures and the publication of an action plan after COP15 in China.

Furthermore, the Commission addressed the land and sea use changes, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution and invasive alien species that all have an impact on species and habitats. The aim is to try to find an integrated way of combining the different pressures on ecosystems.

It was also noted that multifunctional role of forests is important and interservice consultation will be conducted to ensure policy coherence. Healthy and biodiverse ecosystems are important to increase climate resilience. Stakeholders input will be gathered but it is still not decided in which form.

Regarding the question on links to DG AGRI's forest conference, the Commission promised to come back with the answer.

It was highlighted that the Commission will consult the stakeholders as it comes to 2030 strategy. Coherence with other policies will be ensured and the Commission is currently working on it. Regarding the damages of forests, it noted that the forecasts are dramatic and long denial of the drivers and scientific evidence have led to a situation that is devastating. The Commission will seek ways to strengthen biodiversity that would ensure that forests are more resilient towards climate change. It was also mentioned that releasing other pressures would also help forests. Regarding the species it noted that it is important to focus on the species of the same continent and perhaps some species from South could be suitable. It noted that the bark beetles are a problem in plantations and reminded that perhaps choose of the species (spruce) was not the best option at first place. To conclude the Commission noted that soil carbon and old growth forests are important from the carbon storage perspective.

3.3. Deforestation – EU Communication (2019) on Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests

The European Commission made a presentation that is available on CIRCABC.

Questions

CEPF noted that it is important to put forests in the context of international policy framework and welcomed the Communication.

EUSTAFOR thanked the Commission for the good presentation and stressed the importance of tackling global deforestation. Even though Eustafor has not been following international processes in detail, it reiterated that consumption patterns in the EU do matter as regards global deforestation and therefore the EU is a key player. It asked what kind of regulative measures are foreseen in this respect and what are the tasks of the taskforce mentioned in the presentation. It referred to previous discussions during the meeting related to Biodiversity Strategy and noted that bark beetles are not only an issue in monocultures. Geographical conditions have an impact that in Nordic countries there are only few species. Adaptation, deforestation and biodiversity policies should all go under the umbrella of sustainable forest management in which these issues should be looked from the holistic perspective.

CEI-Bois asked if the Commission plans to extend the scope of the EU Timber Regulation.

WWF mentioned that it was good that the Commission was looking at the footprint. In addition, it questioned the management in the EU's forests and noted that things were not that good in these forests.

CEPF said that the Communication was very timely and important to address deforestation in tropical forests. It asked what the Commission means as it is written that more needs to be done in the EU's forests. More information is needed on that statement. It also asked about the link between this Communication and the EU Forest Strategy as well as the Adaptation Strategy and noted that all needs to work together. It also asked about the sustainability provisions in the trade agreements such as in Mercosur.

CEPF noted about the importance of consistence as it comes to sustainability requirements in and outside the EU. An example was given on the proposal on taxonomy for sustainable investments.

Via Campesina agreed with WWF on the footprint and the global view. It reminded about times of de-regulations and devastating consequences for small-scaled farmers. It criticized capitalism and liberalism that have led to dominance of big companies and industries.

CEPI stressed the importance of not confusing consumers with additional layers and reminded about the existence of EU Timber Regulation and labels that cover more than deforestation. These labels proof sustainable forest management and it is of utmost importance to ensure consistence.

CEI-Bois reminded that agricultural expansion is the main driver of deforestation and asked how agricultural producers and traders are integrated into the platform. It also mentioned that the first global importer of logs is China whereas Europe is 4th. 2/3 of international timber trade goes to China. It also reminded that illegality and sustainability are two different things.

EUSTAFOR thanked for the clear presentation and noted that the discussion in the meeting room was not clear. It is crucial to know if the European forests are addressed. It

reminded that the commodities that are used in the EU are causing problems, but this has nothing to do with the European forests.

WWF highlighted the role of the EU on deforestation and called for leadership in tackling the problem. It addressed that it is time to put in place a regulation that would stop the imports of the products that are associated with deforestation.

CEPF reminded about the importance of land tenure and property rights as it comes to tackling deforestation.

COPA noted that WWF raised an important issue and highlighted that trade agreements are suitable and only possible instrument to hinder imports of products that are associated with deforestation.

Via Campesina noted that land grabbing is a big issue.

CEETAR wanted more news about “transparency of supply chain” which should be enhanced in order to include all actors and mentioned that the problems in illegal working conditions in forests should also be considered.

COPA noted that illegal logging is taking place at larger scale than legal deforestation and reminded that care should be taken when using the terms.

Answers from the Commission

On the taskforce, the Commission answered that more information will follow in due course. The call for application is also foreseen in due course. On the regulatory measures, the Commission noted that all options, also the non-regulatory ones are currently discussed internally. It mentioned that EU Timber Regulation is one of the tools as well as ecolabel and certifications.

Regarding the extension of the product scope of EU Timber Regulation, the Commission noted that a study is on hold due to changes in the Commission.

The Commission took note on the observations of WWF. Regarding the scope of the Communication, it noted that focus is not only on tropical forests but also on EU’s forests especially as it comes to forest fires. The Commission could not provide the participants of the meeting with an answer as it comes to the question on what should be done in the EU’s forests since it was another unit who had included the point in the Communication.

The Commission mentioned that the EU Forest Strategy is coming to an end and there are discussions on way forward. It noted that in the Mercosur the sustainability provisions aim at ensuring that sustainable forest management is followed and that is the case also in the Paris Agreement. The Commission said that it will ask the colleagues on the applicability of taxonomy criteria outside the EU.

Regarding the questions of Eustafor, the Commission noted that it will communicate as soon as the next steps are developed. Feedback from the stakeholders would be appreciated.

The Commission took note on the remark made by Via Campesina and said that it was not familiar with the respective regulation. It thanked CEPI for the concerns it raised and on CEI-Bois it said that all relevant actors will be included in the Platform.

The Commission was aware of the illegal trade of China and said that they are working to solve the problem by using bilateral agreements.

The Commission was not sure what Copa meant with the point on illegal logging and legal deforestation and noted that illegal logging often leads to deforestation. It pointed out that FLEGT deals with these topics and EU Timber Regulation is in place, also for domestic timber.

The Chair noted that EU external affairs are crucial, and a strong Communication is needed. More needs to be done at global level.

3.4. RED II: Implementation of bioenergy sustainability criteria

The European Commission made a presentation that is available on CIRCABC.

Questions

EEB asked about the three deliverables and REDIIBIO project.

CEPF asked when the guidance will be published.

The Chair asked how the EU Biodiversity Strategy and EU Forest Strategy are considered in REDII implementation.

Answers from the Commission

REDIIBIO will be used as input to the implementing act.

The Directive enters into force in 2021 and Member State can establish a verification scheme. Operators can also rely on voluntary schemes that are valid across the EU. For the moment only few Member States have indicated that they will establish a national scheme. Consequently, they have chosen to rely on voluntary schemes.

The Commission is working with the implementing acts and the reactions for the legislative proposal depend on the upcoming Commission and how fast Member States will react to the Commission proposal.

On the Chair's question, the Commission noted that REDII is a part of the Clean Energy Package and the topic was discussed during the legislative process. It noted that bioenergy is a significant contributor to energy mix, and it needs to be produced in a sustainable manner while keeping in mind balancing the harvesting of biomass and enhancing the carbon sink.

3.5. State of EU forests, recent extreme events (including bark beetle outbreaks)

The European Commission gave an oral presentation on the state of EU forests, more particular on recent extreme events affecting EU forests.

Questions

COPA highlighted that the consequences of bark beetle outbreak are devastating for forest owners and the multifunctional role of forests. They noted that funds provided by

Rural Development are not enough and asked if there would be a possibility to use e.g. EU Solidarity Fund.

CEI-Bois made a statement on behalf of EOS and said that the situation in the markets is dramatic as the stock of wood is increasing and markets are overflooded. The situation also considers hardwood as oak and beech have been suffering of drought. They called for an agenda on how to solve the problem. Sawmills use certain kinds of wood species and machines cannot be replaced according to which wood species are available.

CEPF thanked the Commission for describing the situation and said it was good that the EU is reacting. It also noted that solving this kind of problems should be a priority in the EU Forest Strategy.

ELO noted that the lack of uptake of measures does not mean that there is no need for funding. New possibilities are needed, and an EU Solidarity Fund could be one possible tool.

EUSTAFOR said that they have been monitoring the situation via their members. According to data on damages received, timber loss is approximately 32 million m³. 1,2 million hectares is damaged not only by bark beetle but also storms and drought. Scots pine, oak and beech are in bad condition and financing is desperately needed, also in state-owned forests. In addition, they mentioned that it is not beneficial to discuss in silos e.g. adaptation and biodiversity. In case we do not have healthy forest, there will be no carbon sink nor any other function of forests delivered. The future EU Forest Strategy should be the platform to discuss forest-relevant questions, such as multi-purpose forestry.

COGECA asked to distribute a written version of the statement to the participants.

COPA noted that e.g. in Austria the Rural Development funds have been used due to the last five years of drought. Without support for forest owners' timber supply will suffer.

CEJA reiterated that there have been all kinds of natural disasters due to climate change and this generation has to deal with this situation. It is challenging to motivate small-scale farmers and forest owners as they have lost a big part of their land. National or EU funds are desperately needed in order to motivate them to continue. This has a big impact on rural development as well as on the achievement of climate and bioeconomy goals. It would be important to send a message that it is worth to continue to invest in forests.

CEPF noted as well that it is important to motivate forest owners. They stressed the importance of the EU Forest Strategy and said that among the CEPF members a survey is ongoing to find out more about damages in private forests.

Answers from the Commission

Improving the resilience of forest resources is of utmost importance to the Rural Development. Uptake of forestry measures could be improved. Regarding the new CAP, the idea is to provide Member States with more flexibility to adapt interventions better to regional and national needs.

The Commission shared the concerns expressed by the sawmilling industry representative and that it is important to continue dialogue also with DG GROW.

The Commission reminded the participants that negotiations on MFF and CAP are still open. In addition, the future of the EU Strategy is open as well.

The Commission reminded that forest policies are national issues and EU can only support. As regards to negotiations of future policies, the Commission took note of the wishes related to a EU Solidarity Fund. It highlighted that current Rural Development funds are not fully used, and it is up to Member States and regional authorities to tap into these possibilities.

They also presented a variety of EU funds such as the Cohesion Fund, the Civil Protection Mechanism, LIFE and the research programs.

The Commission agreed with EUSTFOR's comment that the EU Forest Strategy should integrate all aspects of forests. It will be for the new Commission to decide on the possible new EU Forest Strategy. Regarding the EU Solidarity Fund the Commission noted that there are clear rules on how these funds can be used.

The Commission noted that the discussion on the situation of EU's forests should go beyond financial needs as the current policy framework is fixed and the future framework is still open. However, it took note of the suggestions and said that it would be important to be able to react rapidly as natural disturbance occurs.

Regarding the points raised on forest owners' motivation, the Commission was curious to know what the means would be to keep the motivation i.e. what kind of policy tools would be needed and what should be done from the EU side.

3.6. State of play of Commission work on Sustainable Finance – Outcome of the public consultation and next steps (tbc)

The European Commission gave a brief introduction on the state of play.

Questions

EUSTAFOR mentioned that development of the taxonomy is a good example as policies are worked in silos. As it comes to the sustainability criteria for forests, a more comprehensive system could be developed. It would be important not going beyond the REDII sustainability requirements for forest biomass.

CEPF noted that the joint statement, that include the previous speakers' point, is available online.

ELO made a remark on energy transition and climate change mitigation and stressed the importance of multifunctional role of forests.

3.7. State of play on the EU Adaptation Strategy

The European Commission gave a presentation that is available on CIRCABC.

Questions

The Chair noted that the biodiversity was not mentioned.

ELO said that forestry is a simple way of tackling climate change. Forest health fosters the availability of wood. It noted that the policy measures proposed in the strategy are passive and do not encourage the use of wood.

WWF stressed that the nature has ability to recover after natural disturbances and nature-based solutions are the most cost-effective ones. It made a remark on the importance of using local species and avoid monoculture plantations.

EEB suggested to study deeper in to ecosystem-based adaptation and noted that this area has not received enough attention. It also highlighted the importance of monitoring.

EUSTAFOR also raised the importance of monitoring and welcomed development of FISE as an EU wide system.

EURAF highlighted the importance of other ecosystem services, besides wood production, and talked about the benefits of grazing and pastoralism. It also suggested to take better advantage of agroforestry that provides solutions to many challenges related to climate change and ecosystem health.

CEETTAR reminded that forestry workers and contractors face the impacts of climate change and the working conditions are very challenging as it comes to heat waves for manual activities, extreme rain with machinery or profitability. We need skills and innovation. It is important to know what to plant but it is also important to anticipate the new forestry working conditions. The question is how to disseminate new innovative practices to small companies. In case clear cuts are needed e.g. due to pests, it needs to be explained to the public in order to get the acceptance.

COPA said that the benefits of grazing really depend in which part of the Europe we are talking about as in Central Europe it can lead to forest degradation.

EURAF noted to the previous comment that it did not mean overgrazing. It also said that other uses, such as picking up berries and collecting medicinal plants, are also parts of agroforestry systems.

COPA noted that forests are very different across the Europe and not one fit for all solutions can be found. It also talked about the long-term climate strategy and just transition.

Answers from the Commission

The Commission highlighted that the strategy presented is on climate change adaptation, not on biodiversity.

Furthermore, the Commission explained that the idea is to make primary production and forests more resilient whereas some of the questions focused on wood mobilization. Natural disturbances have always existed, but now due to climate change the frequency and intensity of extreme events is expected to increase pressure. There are however a number of drivers other than climate change that are also affecting forests' health and resilience to disturbances. The Commission referred to a workshop held in Istanbul which focused on forests' resilience and identified a full spectrum of instruments from governance to silviculture. Vegetation zones are moving faster than forecasted in 1980 and adaptation needs are massive. The Commission also mentioned that thought should be given to the type of adaptation pursued and whether one should favor adaptability and transformability to new settings or maintaining the resource/activity as it is currently.

3.7. Forestry sector in Horizon Europe

The European Commission gave a presentation that is available on CIRCABC.

Questions

COGECA asked would the agriculture and forestry sectors benefit from 10 billion earmarked for natural resources?

CEPF mentioned the Forest-based Sector Technology Platform (FTP) that actively follows the developments of Horizon Europe from the perspective of the forest sector. It reminded the FTP's vision 2040 launched a few months ago and the coming FTP conference on 27 November in Helsinki during which the FTP Strategic Innovation and Research Agenda (SIRA) will be presented.

CEI-Bois asked about how to define high-value bio-based products.

Answers from the Commission

The Commission noted that the MFF negotiations are ongoing, so it was early to say about the 10 billion. It took note on the CEPF comments and said that they have been in contact with FTP. Regarding the question on high-value products, the Commission will ask the colleagues at DG RTD.

4. Conclusions/recommendations/opinions

Mr **Antonio Paula Soares** (CEPF) was elected as a Chairman of the group; Mr **Mårten Larsson** (CEPI) and Mrs **Kelsey Perlman** (EEB) were elected as Vice-Chairs.

5. Next steps

The points for discussion that were on the agenda will continue to be debated in the next meetings.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting of the CDG for Forestry and cork will take place on 9 July 2020.

7. List of participants - Annex

Disclaimer

"The opinions expressed in this report represent the point of view of the meeting participants from agriculturally related NGOs at community level. These opinions cannot, under any circumstances, be attributed to the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of the here above information."

List of participants– Minutes

Civil Dialogue Group Forestry and Cork

8 November 2019

MEMBER ORGANISATION	NUMBER OF PERSONS
Confédération Européenne des Entrepreneurs de Travaux Techniques Agricoles, Ruraux et Forestiers/ European Organisation of Agricultural, Rural and Forestry Contractors (CEETTAR)	1
Confédération Européenne des Propriétaires Forestiers (CEPF)	8
Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI)	2
European Agri-Cooperatives (COGECA)	5
European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT)	-----
European Agroforestry Federation (EURAF)	1
European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois)	2
European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC)	3
European Council of Young farmers (CEJA)	3
European Environmental Bureau (EEB)	1
European farmers (COPA)	6
European Landowners' Organization asbl (ELO asbl)	5
European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR)	2
Federation Europeenne des Communes Forestieres (FECOF)	1
International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements EU Regional Group (IFOAM EU Group)	1
Stichting BirdLife Europe (BirdLife Europe)	1
Union de selvicultores del sur de Europa, AEIE (USSE)	2
Union of European Foresters (UEF)	1
WWF European Policy Programme (WWF EPO)	2
TOTAL:	47