

# **Standing Forestry Committee**

## **Reflection paper – Working modalities**

This is a Draft Reflection paper as a basis for discussions on working modalities of the Standing Forestry Committee and as such in current stage doesn't commit the relevant actors, until agreement is reached in the SFC.

### **Background**

The EU Forest Strategy identifies the Standing Forestry Committee, set up by the Council Decision 89/367/EEC, as its main governance body, and the forum for discussing all forest-related issues, ensuring coordination and coherence of forest-related policies, identifying a role for it to ensure keeping the forests multifunctional.

The mid-term review on progress of implementation of the EU Forest Strategy concluded on the need for additional efforts and commitment to strengthen coordination, cooperation and expert involvement, including across sectors and between the Commission, Member States and other stakeholders.

A specific seminar was held back to back to the SFC meeting of 28 September 2018, where its members attended on a voluntary basis, to reflect about the work of the Committee and identify areas for potential improvement, within the common view to keep it as the forum for discussing all forest-related issues.

In this note, options to improve the coordination, cooperation and outputs of the SFC to successfully address the areas identified as needing additional attention are proposed. These areas include:

- ✓ Ensuring a timely information to SFC regarding the various policy processes by planning the committee's work well in advance;
- ✓ Enhancing the use of the SFC for sharing of information and good practice
- ✓ Further engaging with other sectoral policies

### **Options for Working modalities**

***Ensuring a timely information SFC regarding the various policy processes by planning the committee's work well in advance***

***Optimising the existing setting: the SFC Annual Work Plan and the SFC***

To ensure timely information of the SFC to the policy process, the work of the SFC needs to be planned well in advance. The SFC Annual Work Plan (AWP) is the most appropriate tool linking the EU Forest Strategy and the Forest MAP with the ongoing and forthcoming policy developments and the activities of the Committee itself.

The SFC Annual Work Plan can be optimised as a planning tool for the Members of the SFC, as it identifies in advance topics and sectors that will be dealt with along the year. The AWP is therefore a very important tool for the work of the SFC and should therefore not be perceived as a mere list of agenda items for meetings. The AWP should be built in a joint effort between the Commission and the Member States, with contributions on relevant topics and topics for discussion coming from both sides. However, agenda should be flexible enough, to allow changes depending on the latest developments.

Building on the AWP, the meetings of the SFC should be milestones of a continued work of the Committee, and not isolated events along the year. In this respect, some potential ways of optimising the use of the SFC meetings and the AWP could be:

- A more prominent role in the meetings to points for discussion, better structured according to thematic areas, and addressing topics of agreed interest/forthcoming policy development;
- Develop preparatory work for the sessions well in advance
  - Proposal of topics/experts to feed into discussions
  - Working remotely in smaller dedicated groups in the intersessions periods in preparation of forthcoming topics
- Sending questions relating to the theme of the meeting beforehand, to stimulate the preparation of discussion, and to ensure the capacity of Commission services to reply whenever they are affected by the topics/questions
- Discussions could finalise with some reflection on next steps for all members, including:
  - Interaction with sectoral counterparts in national administrations, in particular with national colleagues working in other committees/groups
  - Proposal for specific actions e.g. on communication
  - Proposal to the secretariat (DG AGRI) for specific steps to be taken by the Commission (e.g. inviting DGs, sending docs, etc.), and for MS to follow up with .

### *Opinions of the SFC*

Increased impact/visibility of the SFC opinion could be sought, by:

- Increasing traceability of opinions: the Commission and the country delegates could report back to the SFC on recipients of the Committee's opinions.
- Recipients could be invited to provide comments/reactions to the SFC opinions.

### ***b) Enhancing the use of the SFC for sharing of information and good practice***

There is a shared perception that there is a need for increased sharing of information and exchange of good practice. It can be achieved by:

- Topics of interest for enhanced exchange of information can be proposed well in advance and agreed by a significant number of countries. Member States can send their proposals

for topics in the planning period, probably catalysed by a short questionnaire from the Commission. Where complex topics are addressed, working groups or seminars could be set-up to ensure in-depth discussion and discuss possible and expected outputs/follow-up.

- Preparatory work similar to the one proposed in section a) above should be carried out in preparation for effective exchange of information.
- The country or countries proposing the topics for information sharing and exchange could prepare questions and a template to gather information on specific elements of the topic. The Commission could compile this information and circulate it.
- Optimising existing communication tools, such as CIRCABC; additional tools providing continuity to information sharing could be considered: repositories, discussion forums, etc.
- Summary publications/brochures developed by volunteering members of the SFC could compile key findings/sources of information/conclusions.
- Issuing a newsletter periodically compiling outcomes from meetings, examples and good practice from Member States, events, recent national policy developments (e.g. reviews of legislation), information on RDP measures and how they devised them, etc.
- In case of interest to discuss further specific topics in more open format and also inviting other stakeholders, such events could be organised (by interested MS) back to back with SFC, and then report back to the SFC with the outcomes.

### ***c) Further engaging with other sectoral policies***

Enhanced interaction with relevant Commission DGs fits and can build on the Rules of Procedure of the SFC. In this respect, options to achieve this aim would include:

#### **Operation of the Group - SFC Chairing:**

- DG AGRI chairs the meetings.
- Co-chairing of meetings with other DGs is possible and could be positive to empower the SFC within the Commission and build better understanding of the forest developments, e.g. in Member States. DG AGRI can invite the most relevant DG, according to the meeting agenda, to co-chair. Co-chairing could be planned well in advance, building on the topics identified in the AWP. DGs that could be invited to co-chair meetings include CLIMA, SANTE, RTD, ECHO...
- Ensuring that relevant Commission services are present and able to reply.
- [A Member State (e.g. the one holding presidency), could be involved, supporting the Commission in preparation of the meetings and activities of the SFC.
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#### **Interaction with other groups and experts**

Joint meetings with other groups are possible (RoP point 2) but discouraged, given the low success and added value of efforts made in the past. As alternatives:

- *CDG - Forestry and Cork*: The chair of the Civil Dialogue Group on Forestry and Cork holds and observer position in the SFC. The chair could be invited to briefly report on results of main discussions/reflections from the CDG-FC in the first meeting following their meetings. [Minutes from respective meetings of SFC and CDG FC could be uploaded to the portals of the other body].
- SFC sub-groups could be planned well in advance to produce opinions on topics that will be prominent in the policy agenda, and present them in the relevant meetings of other groups. These groups could comprehend: CGBN, SCAR-Forest, EG-Forest based Industries, EEA forest group, etc. In case an opinion of the SFC is desired, a seminar could be organised back to back to SFC meetings, focussing on a specific topic.
- The relevant sectoral groups (CGBN, etc.) could also be invited to present the outcomes of their work to the SFC.
- Sectoral Groups: working groups could be set-up, made-up of a sub-group of committed experts from the SFC (RoP point 7) and experts from other committees or expert groups from thematic areas (e.g. research, biodiversity, adaptation). This would allow for more dedicated sessions and exchange of views, and or proposing/addressing joint work. Close contact with national colleagues participating in other committees/expert groups to receive information about work that is been done elsewhere. This can lead to a more proactive response to forest-related developments, and prevent duplication of work.
- Discussions can be stimulated by inviting specific thematic experts to provide keynote presentations, either to the plenary sessions or to the subgroups (or sectoral groups).

### **Implementing the new working modalities**

Some new working arrangements would include (some already initiated in 2019):

#### *Redesigning the meeting agendas and the functioning of the sessions*

- Thematic discussion sessions at each meeting, allowing for:
  - Priorities will be determined in the AWP, so the Commission and the SFC Members are both better able to determine developments of interest to the SFC.
  - More focused debates will be proposed, guided by questions.
  - Avoiding delays in discussions, the interventions should be short, precise and to the point, with a possible defined time limit to both presentations and subsequent interventions.
  - Allowing delegates to propose topics and prepare well in advance for meetings, including through contacts to their sectoral counterparts in national administrations.
  - Possibility for permanent members to invite other national sectoral experts to tailor the country representation to the specific meeting, e.g. including one national expert on the sectoral topic to discuss.

- Points for information will not be always consisting in physical presentations. Some information points will be addressed by uploading documents beforehand in the CIRCABC, and brought to the sessions only for Q&A.
  - Avoids overwhelming presentation sessions, making meetings more agile.
  - Allows keeping focus on topics where interest is manifest.
  - Reduce number of Points for Information. Such points should preferably be presented in writing only, and only if requested by the delegates in advance, an oral presentation will be made.

*Promoting more active participation and involvement*

- Member States are invited to contribute to the sessions design (to the AWP, to selection of topics for discussions and information sharing, etc.), avoiding unilateral information provision from the Commission
- Discussion sessions will always be catalysed by questions proposed by the SFC Secretariat (with possible support from 1 Member State) in advance, allowing for focused debate.
- The utility of using tools for wide and fast compilation of views (e.g. Mentimeter) on the questions posed for discussion can be explored
- After discussion sessions, a concluding reflection can be added, including on next steps for the Commission and follow-up by Member States, if relevant.