

Seminar on how to secure and demonstrate Sustainable Forest Management in the EU in the context of the EU Green Deal and the new EU Forest Strategy

Sustainable Forest Management globally and in the EU

- Sustainable forest management (SFM) concept is central to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UNFF, to which the EU and MS are parties, adopted the UNFPS 2017-30 with goals, targets and areas for action for the contribution of forests to it through the promotion SFM and the contribution of forests and trees to progress on inter alia the SDGs, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, or the Paris Agreement.
- UNFCCC and CBD processes, on their side, support promoting SFM as a means to address their objectives. The IPBES concluded that the needed transformative change demands to achieve SFM.
- Sustainable Forest Management is ‘a dynamic and evolving concept intended to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental value of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations’. (UNFPS 2017)
- Under Forest Europe (EU and MS are signatories), criteria and indicators of SFM have been agreed. EU Member States report every 5 years based on them. The reporting is voluntary and non-binding. The EU SFM criteria and indicators are under constant review.
- EU Forest Strategy 2013-2020 contains a definition of SFM that is the same as in Forest Europe. The 2020 objective was ***to ensure and demonstrate by 2020 that all forests are managed according to sustainable forest management.***
- Back in 2014, the SFC set-up an ad-hoc WG, with Members of the SFC and the Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork, to address the need for "objective, ambitious and demonstrable sustainable forest management (SFM) criteria that can be applied in different policy contexts such as climate change, bioenergy or bioeconomy, regardless of the end use of biomass". A relevant report (with Annexes) produced should be a reference for future developments.
- Most evidence suggests that European forestry sector does practice sustainable forest management, and its principles are widely applied to Europe’s forests. (European Environment Agency 2015).

Challenges:

- Forests have arisen as part of the solution to many global challenges and key contributors to EU objectives. Many EU policies influence forest management, and there are tensions to achieve the right equilibrium. To mention some: Climate change (LULUCF), Biodiversity, Circular Bioeconomy, Rural development (social and economic rights of people).
- SFM seems the right approach to address all these challenges, but the agreed SFM concepts and development are often ignored or questioned outside the forest sector.
- Forest sector and stakeholders feel questioned/challenged by EU policies and actors. Simultaneously, the forest sector is often isolated and perceived as working in a bubble.
- Reporting and information gaps contribute to keep the divide and preclude mutual understanding among sectors. The voluntary monitoring/reporting by the countries on SFM under Forest Europe, and the compulsory reporting on the state of biodiversity (State of

Nature report) often provide an incomplete picture. Also, there is a pervasive trend to consider both data sources as contradictory instead of supplementary.

- There is poor communication on the need to manage forests sustainably. EU citizens, disconnected from forests and rural land, have a different perception and demand untouched forests.

How can the EU Forest Strategy address those challenges?

The EU Forest Strategy should contribute to address the challenges above, and several options could be envisaged including through governance, sectoral commitments, targeted policy initiatives, reporting, or communication.

The Commission would like to initiate some dedicated discussions at the Seminar, starting by reflecting on the following questions:

- How can the EU and MS demonstrate the contribution of EU forests and the forest sector to Green Deal and international sustainability commitments?
- What actions/commitments from the Member States or the Commission could be done to further ensure and demonstrate the sustainable management of EU forests?
- How can sustainable and multifunctional forests be best communicated to different actors? (politicians/sectoral actors/civil society)