Woodworking Industries: at the heart of the circular bioeconomy

The Woodworking Industries welcome and support the review of the 2012 EU Bioeconomy Strategy that aims to combine the best properties of bioeconomy and circular economy to support sustainable development in Europe.

Developing Europe’s circular bioeconomy enables replacing an increasing number of products made from non-renewable raw materials with products made from renewable resources, thus fostering the transition from a fossil-carbon based economy towards a renewable bio-based economy. The wood value chain is at the heart of this process: it begins with sustainably sourced raw materials, followed by highly resource-efficient processing providing a multitude of wood products for numerous applications. Additionally, by-products such as wood dust and chips can be further used for manufacturing increasing number of products or as a renewable energy source. Virtually all wood products can be reused and recycled. Clearly, the Woodworking Industries are a central actor in Europe’s future bioeconomy, particularly in terms of its contributions to economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

Executive Summary

The Woodworking Industries welcome the EU Bioeconomy Strategy as an opportunity, calling for it to:

✓ highlight the importance and relevance of the woodworking industries and its inherent circular and bio-based properties

✓ take into account the carbon sink and material substitution effects of harvested wood products

✓ increase wood mobilization following sustainable forest management practices and the principles of the EU Forest Strategy

✓ consider new measures to remove obstacles for using wood in construction, e.g. by enabling additional research

✓ focus on additional innovation and funding for efficient technologies and new wood-based products including innovative applications of hardwood species

✓ consider the need for free but fair trade of wood and wood products, particularly in international trade agreements

✓ consider the health benefits of increased use of wood products in households and at the workplace

✓ continue fostering the multi-sector synergies that bring holistic approaches for the future bioeconomy society.
The carbon sink effect of harvested wood products and the material substitution effects for energy-intensive fossil based materials are key arguments for facilitating an increased production and use of wood products. The production and processing of wood is highly energy-efficient, giving wood products a low carbon footprint. Every cubic meter of wood used in buildings, has captured almost one ton of CO₂ from the atmosphere. Moreover, every cubic meter of wood used as a substitute for other building materials reduces CO₂ emissions by an average of one ton. Finally, the stored energy in wood biomass can be recovered when used as renewable energy.

Sustainable forest management contributes to the realization of a bioeconomy that is based on adequate and continuous availability of renewable raw material. The Woodworking Industries are committed to source wood from forests that are managed following the ecological, economic and social principles of sustainability. Wood availability should never be a limiting factor under sustainable management of renewable resources. Wood mobilization is a key factor for ensuring this raw material’s availability for the processing industries and in a more general way for all uses of forest biomass. Wood is an essential ecosystem service of the forest, and while producing wood, sustainably managed forests also provide a variety of other ecosystem services such as nutrient cycling, water regulation, food, recreation and climate regulation including carbon sequestration. European forests increase the growing stock and sequester 9% of European net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The long-term sequestration of CO₂ into forests and its mitigation of climate change can be further increased by active and proper management of forests as well as by afforestation measures.

Innovative engineered wood for structural uses and state-of-the-art timber frame building systems are fit for contributing to low-carbon houses and city development. The societal acceptance of wood in the city and building with wood is high. Regrettfully, overarching obstacles related to building with wood are still reported by construction sector actors. Woodworking Industries call for eliminating these obstacles so that wood construction is not at disadvantage when compared to other building methods, thus enabling fairer competition with other sectors and materials. Regulatory adjustments are needed. Here, increased funding support in the field of wood construction research can be part of a coherent EU Bioeconomy Strategy.

A competitive Woodworking industry invests into new climate friendly products and more efficient technologies. Forests provide raw material that is reusable and recyclable, and wood is used to produce a broad range of traditional as well as new innovative products for daily living. The EU research and innovation funding will be needed to ensure the various bioeconomy projects in the long run. For example, less than 20 % of the wood-based products in the EU are made from hardwood, and therefore development of new, innovative, marketable hardwood products is one important and demanding challenge facing research and development in the wood sector. Moreover, the wood sector consists of many small and medium sized companies with limited resources, and therefore, the availability of the research and innovation funding for them is of crucial importance.

The Woodworking Industries represent companies that trade and do business across many borders, thus spreading the benefits of bioeconomy globally. Their success requires open markets and level playing fields. The promotion of bioeconomy in the EU must not take place by implementing trade restrictions. Instead, as a part of bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations, the EU must ensure that harvested wood products are able to compete effectively and enter markets in third countries and are not discriminated against. Also, access to needed raw materials and other inputs from outside the EU can contribute to the emergence and spread of bioeconomy.

The use of wood promotes health and well-being of people. Wood constructions and wood products used in homes, the workplace and in public buildings ensure a good indoor air quality. Wood is beautiful, and wood’s natural warmth and comfort have been shown to have calming, stress reducing effects. At the same time functional furniture made from wood has become increasingly important, as
population is ageing. The Woodworking Industries call for recognizing the full potential of wood as improving life quality and health of people of all ages and different environments.

**The circular bioeconomy does not develop by itself – consumer choices ultimately determine its success.** Political efforts and knowledge sharing including public procurement efforts are needed that tend to make it easier for new climate-friendly products and technologies to enter to the market, as well as to stimulate consumers to choose products made from bio-based materials. The Public Procurement Directive 2014/24/EU even allows for further steps toward sustainable procurement via life-cycle costing: a fair assessment method could include currently non-monetised environmental effects and production processes. The wood industry is aware of the multi-sector environment of the emerging bioeconomy and supports the views on collaboration and creating synergies expressed in the European Bioeconomy Stakeholders Manifesto (November 2017): “By giving more visibility among sectors and to consumers, the innovations will diversify, and market pull can be stimulated for new products. The bioeconomy concept builds the critical mass needed for us to effectively address the grand societal challenges.”

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CEI-Bois, the European Confederation of Woodworking Industries, represents 24 European and National organizations from 16 countries and is the Organization backing the interests of the whole industrial European wood sector: more than 175,000 companies generating an annual turnover of 125 billion euros and employing 1 million workers in the EU.