

Towards a new EU Forest Strategy: position of the European Woodworking Industry

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CEI-Bois, the European Confederation of the Woodworking Industries, welcomed the adoption of the Forest Strategy in 2013¹ and supports today the preparation of a new Strategy, announced in the European Green Deal.

A new Strategy at EU level is needed to provide a **coherent framework** for all the initiatives planned under the European Green Deal that bear an impact on European forests, ranging from climate and environmental policy to agricultural development and circular bioeconomy, just to name a few.

The new Strategy should also continue to be a tool for stimulating EU Countries to cooperate and for ensuring the timely engagement of relevant stakeholders in forest-related initiatives.

Finally, the new Strategy should keep the holistic approach to sustainable forest management at its heart, as defined in the 1993 Helsinki resolution of FOREST EUROPE:

“the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfill, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems”.

The 2013 Strategy was built on 8 different priority areas that addressed all three pillars of sustainability (environmental, economic and social) in a balanced way, an approach that should be maintained also in the new Strategy.

CEI-Bois wishes to stress the need for a strong Forest Strategy which:

- Recognises the whole forest value chain from forestry to the forest-based industries such as the woodworking industry as key ally in climate change mitigation through carbon sink, storage and substitution;
- Acknowledges that sustainable and active forest management is an effective way to prevent forest damages (pests, storms, fires) and reminds that in addition to economic losses damaged forests lose their biodiversity value and role as carbon sinks;
- Recognises the role of the forest-based circular bioeconomy in the creation of additional green jobs and growth in rural and urban areas;
- Is based on a strong knowledge base;
- Fully respects Member States subsidiarity on forest policy and recognizes the characteristics such as different economic value of forests in Member States and rural areas.

¹ COM(2013)659.

The way forward

Healthy, multifunctional forests and competitive forest-based value chains are crucial for reaching the objectives of the Green Deal and turn Europe into a prosperous and fair climate-neutral economy. **Sustainable and active forest management** is needed to meet the manifold societal expectations. To name a few:

Climate benefits

- The full climate mitigation potential of the forest sector is best achieved when forests are growing fast through active and sustainable forest management and renewable and recyclable wood-based products replace products made of fossil-based raw materials. Thanks to its properties of absorbing CO₂ and storing carbon in wood, trees and timber play an important role in **mitigating climate change** and in decarbonising key economic sectors such as construction². Today **around 65% of the net annual increment in forests available for wood supply is harvested**³, leaving a continued level of carbon sequestration. The carbon stored during the tree's growth phase is also stored in wood products throughout their life cycle, including re-use and recycling. Overall, the EU's sustainably managed forests produce today a climate mitigation impact amounting to 13% of European total greenhouse gas emissions. This includes both the action of forests and harvested wood products as a **carbon sink** and **carbon stock**, and the **substitution effect** of forest products for functionally equivalent materials and products⁴.
- At the same time, changing climatic conditions cause serious and increasing threats to forests, such as droughts and heat waves, floods, pests and diseases, erosion and forest fires. These natural disturbances cause severe damage to forest ecosystems, human well-being and the provision of ecosystem services, including suitable raw materials for downstream forest industries. Sustainable and active forest management is an effective way to prevent forest damages.

Circular Bioeconomy development

- The new Strategy should further promote the transition to a **circular bioeconomy**. The wood value chain offers an excellent example: it begins with sustainably sourced raw materials (originating for the most part from EU sources⁵), followed by highly resource efficient processing providing wood product for numerous applications. Such development has the potential to decarbonise key sectors of the European economy and reduce dependence on fossil sources. Carbon saving figures for the use of wood in construction can be substantial: for instance, in the Netherlands it was calculated that scaling up the building sector with 10.000

² Building with 1ton of wood instead of 1 ton of concrete leads to an average saving of 2.1 tons of carbon dioxide over the lifecycle. Source: European Commission, Updated Bioeconomy Strategy 2018.

³ Source: Joint Research Centre 2018, Biomass production, supply, uses and flows in the EU.

⁴ G.-J. Nabuurs, P. Delacote, D. Ellison, M. Hanewinkel, M. Lindner, M. Nesbit, M. Ollikainen and A. Savaresi. 2015. A new role for forests and the forest sector in the EU post-2020 climate targets. From Science to Policy 2. European Forest Institute.

⁵ Import reliance for industrial roundwood has been below 10% for the past 15 years. Source: European Commission, EIP on Raw Materials, Raw Materials Scoreboard 2018

timber houses could alleviate 10-42% of the total CO₂ emissions produced by the building sector⁶.

- At the same time, optimising forest biomass growth while answering to other societal expectations and the impacts of climate change requires more insights and knowledge on future supply potential in connection with future demand, as well support to forest owners' capacity building. **Knowledge gaps** should be filled to keep the industry competitive. For example, as the composition of forests will change, the woodworking Industries also need to adapt to a decline of softwood species and a higher share of hardwood species in the raw material supply, depending on the area. Evaluation and assessment of changes in forest tree species composition taking into consideration both the market's demand and the effects of climate change is key in this regard.

Biodiversity

- EU hosts a broad variety of forest ecosystem types, each with their respective challenges including a growing intensity of climate-change induced threats. Around 25% of the total forest area in EU28 is protected under the Natura 2000 scheme, and forest ecosystems make up 50% of the entire Natura2000 network⁷. Successful enhancement of biodiversity in European forests depends on some factors. For example, before any addition of protected areas or new legislation are considered, better implementation of existing nature legislation is needed on already designated sites, based on participatory planning and management, and on appropriate financing. In general, targets in the upcoming Biodiversity Strategy have to stay within realistic limits and based on best available scientific knowledge, also respecting local specificities and Member State subsidiarity on forest policy.

Social sustainability

- Too narrow policy would hinder the sectors possibilities to contribute to the European Green Deal, sustainable development and a shift from fossil-based economy to circular bioeconomy. EU forests are also an essential contributor to **rural development**: multifunctional European forests give their owners income that is necessary to keep the forests sustainably managed. 170.000 companies in the EU belong to the woodworking industry, which represents an important link between urban, peri-urban and rural areas, giving jobs to 1 million workers and adding 133 billion euros to the economy. The forest-based sector as a whole represents around 420.000 enterprises for a total turnover of over 520 billion euros and around 3,5 million workers.

CEI-Bois, the European Confederation of the Woodworking Industries, numbers 18 national organizations, 4 European Sector Federations as well as 1 Private Industrial Group. It is the Organization backing the interests of the whole industrial European wood sector: around 180.000 companies generating an annual turnover of about 144 billion euros and employing 1 million workers in the EU.

⁶ <https://www.w-e.nl/portfolio-item/200-000-ton-minder-co2-uitstoot-meer-houten-woningen>

⁷ Metodi Sotirov (ed.) 2017, Natura 2000 and forests: Assessing the state of implementation and effectiveness. What Science can tell us 7, European Forest Institute.