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PRESS RELEASE: Wood Industry reaction on the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030

Today the European Commission published the new EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which sets up a new EU Nature Restoration Plan, aimed at conserving biodiversity and improving the resilience of natural ecosystems. It sets the target to increase the protected surface area to least 30% of the land from the current 26%, also setting a sub-target of 10% of areas covered by strict protection, with a special focus on primary and old-growth forests.

The Strategy also states that “in addition to strictly protecting all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests, the EU must increase the quantity, quality and resilience of its forests, notably against fires, droughts, pests, diseases and other threats likely to increase with climate change” and that “more resilient forests can support a more resilient economy. They also play an important role in providing materials, products and services, which are key for the circular bio-economy”.

“We agree on the need to improve the resilience of European forests against the challenges of climate change, and we consider that sustainable and active forest management is an effective way to prevent forest damages; this should have been better acknowledged in the Strategy” commented Mr. Antonicoli, Secretary-General of CEI-Bois, also reminding that in addition to economic losses damaged forests lose their biodiversity values and role as carbon sinks.

Sustainable Forest Management, as defined by the Forest Europe process and its criteria and indicators, ensures that the conservation of biodiversity is encompassed within management activities, without the need to impose new protected areas: today 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 network (EFI 2017, *Natura 2000 and Forests*). Therefore, before any addition of protected forest 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.

Finally, to ensure a good balance between all services of the European forests, including social and economic ones, the forthcoming EU Forest Strategy should provide a coherent policy framework based on Sustainable Forest Management. *“A too narrow focus on strict protection could hamper the provision of raw materials for the industry, ultimately undermining its contribution to the objective of a circular and climate-neutral economy”* added Mr. Antonicoli. For instance, timber buildings are key allies in decarbonising construction: 1 m³ of wood stores almost 0.9 ton of CO₂ and allows to save on average another 1ton of CO₂ compared to functionally equivalent materials.

In fact, it is of the utmost importance that the new Forest Strategy recognizes the whole forest value chain from forestry to the forest industry and forest-based products as a key ally in climate change mitigation, including the effect of carbon sink, storage and substitution of fossil-based raw materials.

CEI-Bois represents 23 European and National organisations from 15 countries and is the body backing the interests of the whole industrial European wood sector: more than 180.000 companies generating an annual turnover of 142 billion euros and employing 1 million workers in the EU.