



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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INFORMATION NOTE

from: General Secretariat

to: Delegations

Subject: Preparing forests for climate change: Forest protection and information in the EU
- Council conclusions

Delegations will find annexed the conclusions adopted by the Council (Environment) on
11 June 2010.

**Preparing forests for climate change:
Forest protection and information in the EU
- Council conclusions -**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

- a) Welcoming the presentation by the Commission of the Green Paper on Forest Protection and Information in the EU: preparing forests for climate change ¹, as a follow-up to the White Paper on Adapting to climate change ², which calls for updating the EU Forestry Strategy and the launch of a debate on options for an EU approach on forest protection and forest information;
- b) Acknowledging that forests are of key importance for the environmental, social and economic development of the European continent as a whole; aware that forests and other wooded land host complex natural dynamics and generate multiple benefits; noting the great variability of forest ecosystems on a European scale and the vast biological diversity that they contain;
- c) Aware that forest protection is an integral part of sustainable forest management (SFM) and that SFM, as established within the framework of the Forest Europe process, is consistent with the ecosystem approach and a means for applying it to forests;
- d) Convinced that SFM is key to a diverse, healthy and resilient forest structure and to protecting and fulfilling its multiple functions in Europe; stressing the objectives of mitigating and adapting to climate change and its effects and acknowledging the role of forests in carbon sequestration and in carbon storage, and in substituting for the use of fossil fuels, for example by using wood for energy production;

¹ 7060/10 - COM(2010)66 final.

² “Adapting to Climate Change: towards a European Framework for action” (8526/09 - COM(2009) 147).

- e) Acknowledging that European forests are threatened by both biotic and abiotic agents and that climate change can increase the destructive capacity of these agents, which increase the vulnerability of forests;
- f) Aware that climate change can alter the natural dynamic and the adaptation capacity of forests, a process that can vary depending on the different types of European forests. Likewise, it can affect pest and disease occurrence, and the frequency and magnitude of certain weather-related incidents, such as storms and fires, and increase their destructive capacity;
- g) Considering the heterogeneity of the problems that affect European forests, as well as the need to increase and diversify efforts, not only by focusing on adapting to climate change but also on all challenges and opportunities present in European forest areas;
- h) Bearing in mind that forest conditions are widely divergent throughout the EU and that EU-level actions affecting the forest sector should be complementary in nature and in line with the subsidiarity principle;
- i) Noting the transboundary nature and effects of certain forest-related phenomena and threats, such as pest outbreaks, forest fires or storms, at EU level and on a wider scale;
- j) Reasserting the importance of improving knowledge of the state and evolution of changing factors that affect forests, and acknowledging national, EU and pan-European efforts made towards gathering forest information, as well as the need for comprehensive and comparable information, including through forest inventories, as well as enhanced cooperation and coordination;

- k) Acknowledging the important role of the EU in combating deforestation, forest degradation and desertification, promoting SFM and the protection and restoration of forests inside and outside the EU, including through frameworks such as REDD+³ and sustainable consumption patterns, further development of sustainable agriculture in order to reduce pressure on forest areas through land use change and using specific tools such as GPP⁴, FLEGT-VPAs⁵;
- l) Recognising the importance of the pan-European⁶ cooperation on SFM and its achievements, aimed at promoting, enhancing and safeguarding all forest functions, and following international forest-related commitments entered into by the EU and its Member States⁷;
- m) Recalling the Council conclusions of 24-25 October 2006 on the EU Forest Action Plan 2007-2011, of 22 December 2009 on International Biodiversity beyond 2010, of 15 March 2010 on Biodiversity post-2010⁸ and of 26 April 2010 on forest fire prevention⁹; taking note of the outcome of the international forest protection conference organised in La Granja-Valsaín, Spain, on 6-7 April 2010¹⁰;

Forests within the EU

1. SUPPORTS the objective of ensuring, notably through SFM, that forests continue to supply in the future the goods and services that they provide;

³ Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation.

⁴ Green Public Procurement.

⁵ Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade - Voluntary Partnership Agreements.

⁶ The Forest Europe process and its Ministerial Conferences on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Strasbourg 1990, Helsinki 1993, Lisbon 1998, Vienna 2003 and Warsaw 2007).

⁷ In particular the "Rio forest principles", (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) Annex III, 2b), the UNFF and its NLBI, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

⁸ 7536/10.

⁹ 7788/10.

¹⁰ <http://www.mma.es/portal/secciones/biodiversidad/noticias/index.htm#1>

2. CONSIDERS that further efforts and options for cooperation and coordination at the EU level within the framework of the EU Forestry Strategy and EU Forest Action Plan, with due regard to the subsidiarity principle, should be pursued;
3. STRESSES the need for better adaptation of forests to climate change pressures that can jeopardise the multifunctionality of ecosystems and UNDERSCORES the crucial role they play in climate change mitigation and adaptation, as stated in the conclusions of the Council on 21 October 2009 ¹¹;

Forest information

4. REITERATES the necessity of further evaluating the requirements for forest information at all relevant levels and of promoting better information sharing;
5. RECOGNISES the need for adequate information to identify threats and underlying causes, challenges and shortcomings of existing policies and instruments at national and EU level and to evaluate and take the actions at the appropriate level which are necessary to address them in order to implement SFM; therefore UNDERLINES the need for the continuous assessment and monitoring of the state, dynamics and evolution of European forests, highlighting the role of National Forest Inventory systems and pan-European criteria and indicators;
6. EMPHASISES the importance of having a comprehensive and holistic overview of all relevant forest information systems at national and EU level; RECOGNISES the need for comparable Europe-wide forest information; and ENCOURAGES the collection at European level of information on forests gathered by Member States and other relevant fora, inter alia, through existing European forest information systems such as the European Forest Data Centre;

¹¹ 14790/09.

7. UNDERSCORES the need to further develop as appropriate an EU forest monitoring and information system, taking into account relevant existing structures and processes at national, pan-European and international levels;
8. HIGHLIGHTS the role forest biodiversity plays when adapting to climate change and the need to improve knowledge on forest biodiversity, taking into account the Natura 2000 experience;

Sustainable Forest Management including Forest Protection

9. HIGHLIGHTS the different characteristics of forest areas in each EU Member State and in this context the importance of applying Forest Europe's and national sustainable forest management criteria and indicators;
10. RECOGNISES the significant role that forest owners and other stakeholders play in SFM, including forest protection;
11. RECOGNISES also that forest abandonment can pose a problem when it comes to ensuring that forests continue to perform all their functions;
12. UNDERLINES the positive role that society can play in favour of SFM, including forest protection and adaptation to climate change, as well as the importance of proper communication, education and training on forest issues among active stakeholders and society;
13. STRESSES the need to further mainstream SFM, as established in the Forest Europe process, in EU and national policies affecting forests, bearing in mind specific regional conditions; RECOGNISES that additional benefits could be reaped from better coordination and collaboration between all the relevant EU policies, including as appropriate in relation to existing financial instruments such as under rural development policy, LIFE+ and the instruments to promote bioenergy and the further development of sustainable agriculture in order to reduce pressure on forests through land use change;

14. HIGHLIGHTS the invitation to the Commission, as set out in the Council conclusions of 26 April 2010, to provide an overview of (co)financed projects and actions on forest fires and identify and assess options for better integrating forest fire prevention into EU funding instruments that support sustainable forest management, afforestation and forest recovery after fires, such as the inclusion in the funding instruments of a provision requiring the inclusion of prevention measures in the programmes funded;
15. POINTS OUT the positive role that the sharing of experiences, in particular on different forest management models, including on protective areas such as those relating to high-mountain areas, riverbanks and basins, areas affected by drought and at risk of desertification, and on protected areas such as those included in the Natura 2000 ¹² network, can play in fostering SFM;
16. RECALLS the urgent need to advance work on the economic valuation of non-marketed forest ecosystem goods and services and to advise policy making and implementation;
17. CALLS FOR the strengthening of the cooperation and coordination in the EU and internationally on SFM, including forest protection;
18. LOOKS FORWARD to the outcome of the process initiated with the Commission "Green Paper on Forest Protection and Information in the EU: Preparing forest for climate change"; ENCOURAGES the Commission to pursue this work in close cooperation with Member States, taking into account the results of the ongoing public consultation and stakeholders' views; INVITES the Commission, on this basis, and taking also into account the international dimension, to present a follow-up report before the end of this year, including the consideration of potential further measures, if needed.

¹² Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.