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JOINT STATEMENT

The New EU Forest Strategy: 3 reasons to endorse the committee report

Ahead of the European Parliament’s vote on the report “*The European Forest Strategy – The way forward*” planned for next week, the EU forest and forest-based sector would like to share three reasons why the report voted in the AGRI committee should be supported. In our opinion, the report provides the upcoming EU Forest Strategy with all the essential ingredients to allow forests and the forest-based sector to play their central roles in achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal, including climate neutrality by 2050.

1) All forest functions count

The report builds on sustainability principles which foster the environmental, economic and social benefits of forests and forest management in a balanced manner. It strives to find an equilibrium between biodiversity preservation, climate protection and economic output, in which no function dominates the others. This is well-summarised in the report which points out “*the need to develop a coherent approach to bring together biodiversity protection and climate protection in a thriving forest-based sector and bio-economy*”. Regarding climate change, the report reiterates the necessity to strengthen the overall climate benefits stemming from forests and the forest-based value chain, namely fostering CO₂ sequestration and carbon storage in forests and wood products as well as substituting for fossil-based materials and energy. The report also makes clear that only resilient and healthy forests can continue to deliver these multiple ecosystem services.

This holistic “field reality” approach, based on sustainable forest management, is what the forest and forest-based sector needs from the future EU Forest Strategy in order to continue to fulfil the increasing expectations of the wider society.

2) People, jobs and rural areas count

The report puts human aspects into focus by referring, in particular, to people who work and make their living directly or indirectly from forests and the forest-based sector, but also to citizens who enjoy the multiple benefits forests provide on a daily basis.

The positive role that forests and the forest-based sector play in terms of employment and safe jobs is also pointed out and supported by the report. The value chains of the forest and forest-based sector provide nearly 4 million green European jobs, mostly located in rural areas. The report rightly mentions the importance of preventing a rural exodus by attracting industries to invest in Europe and by investing in ecosystems. In this period of economic, climatic and health crises, it is important to endorse the support the report provides to the forest and forest-based sector in the latter's role as job providers. This support is key for the sector to continue rolling out viable solutions which can contribute to a sustainable and green economic recovery in a sustainable and resource-efficient way.

3) Coherence, coordination and teamwork count

The report calls for an ambitious, independent and self-standing EU Forest Strategy post-2020 and highlights the need for it to be coordinated and better integrated with relevant EU legislations. It also stresses the important role Member States and stakeholders need to take in this process. The future EU Forest Strategy should be a reference tool which provides guidance, expertise and examples of good practices necessary to develop and implement other EU forest-related policies. The Strategy's role is also to ensure that all these policies work together towards the overall international (UN SDGs) and EU goals to be achieved during the next decades. Over the last years, a growing number of EU policies stemming from various sectors, including provisions for forests and the forest-based sector, have been agreed. This has led to a fragmented and complex policy framework. In this context, coherence and teamwork are even more relevant and important and the role of consistency in the future EU Forest Strategy, as described in the report, should be supported.

For all the reasons provided above, we are calling on the European Parliament to endorse and confirm the report *"The European Forest Strategy – The way forward"* when it comes to the plenary vote.