

THE CONTRIBUTION OF FORESTS AND WOOD PRODUCTS FOR A SUSTAINABLE GREEN ECONOMY

In December 2013, several stakeholders involved in the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section adopted the so called “Rovaniemi Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy”. The document provides an overarching vision to develop a green economy, along with targets and specific activities.

Many of the priorities of the Rovaniemi action plan are under implementation, as part of national plans for forests and the forest sector. The European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry recognises that several actions identified in the Rovaniemi action plan should be further developed and implemented in order to enhance the contribution of forests and the forest-based sector for a low carbon economy. Not many industries have a higher degree of interdependency than forestry. How the various links along the forest value chain perform and interact determines the viability of the sector as a whole. The sawmill industries, as part of the forest-based industries, are characterized by an industrial evolution that leads to investments in new products such as bio-composites and engineered wood products.

Sustainably managed forests play a key role in the carbon cycle, releasing oxygen, while locking up carbon dioxide in the trees (and consequently in wood products) and soil. The EU has created effective instruments to support the sustainable management of forests, notably under national forest programmes. EOS believes that the active sustainable management of forests can contribute to enhance the competitiveness of forest-based industries, climate change mitigation, rural development, biodiversity conservation, and forest protection.



As integrated part of the bio-economy, the forest-based sector can play a significant role in decarbonizing the economy if governments seize the opportunity to increase the use of wood products in construction and as “every day” materials.

Utilising wood in an ecologically sustainable manner can make the capture of carbon emissions more effective. Scientific evidence has showed that a cubic metre of wood contains approximately 200 kg of carbon, which equals approximately to 750 kg of carbon dioxide. This corresponds to emissions caused by 5,000 kilometres of driving.

The production and processing of wood uses much less energy (embodied energy) than other building materials, giving wood products a significantly lower carbon footprint. Wood can be used to substitute for materials that require larger amounts of fossil fuels to be produced. Additionally, by raising the degree of processing and value addition of wood, the economic significance of wood increases, thus creating employment and wealth.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The ongoing mid-term **revision of the EU Forest Strategy shall provide coherent actions to boost the competitiveness of the sawmill industries**. Since this sector uses large quantities of wood, its availability - possibly at a competitive price - is a determining factor for the performance of the sawmill industries.
- **Wood mobilisation shall be recognised as one of the most significant challenges** facing the forest sector over the coming decade. **It is about realising expected increases in wood supply**, and meeting rising demands for wood resources from all major end users, in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

PRIORITY ACTIONS' LIST FOR FORESTS AND WOOD PRODUCTS

1. INCREASING SUSTAINABLE WOOD MOBILISATION

- Governments should define an appropriate legal framework to enable sustainable wood mobilisation. Strengthening forest infrastructure and logistics is a crucial precondition to increase wood mobilisation.
- Member States, together with the European Commission, should provide reliable information and data to support effective forest planning and wood mobilisation (while securing environmental and social demands on the ecosystems). The international developments on logs trade (including the presence of logs ban) should be taken into consideration when implementing wood mobilisation measures.
- Member States should exchange best practices in order to identify appropriate measures aiming at encouraging that high quality wood supply from the region's forests is sufficient to satisfy, on a sustainable basis, local industries' needs and society's needs.
- A policy framework for the harmonization of the different certification criteria, as well as endorsement and mutual recognition among existing forest certification programs, should be encouraged both at national and EU level.



2. INVESTING IN AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SECTOR

- Identify and develop new uses for the hardwood resources that are currently underutilized in the framework of the forest bio-economy.
- Identify appropriate initiatives that can assist in attracting investment in forests, timber processing and manufacturing sectors. The wood processing industry should be included in the European framework for rural development programmes.
- Wooden construction should be integrated in forest bio-economy programs, both at European and national level.

3. SET UP GREEN POLICIES

- Apply a reduced VAT rate to environmentally preferable products -such as timber products - while taxing the less preferable ones at the standard rate. This could lead to a relative price reduction for the 'greener' products and thus stimulate the correlated demand.
- Establish procurement policies which encourage the use of (locally) produced sustainable materials with low embodied energy and small carbon footprint, such as timber.
- With a view to implement the LULUCF Regulation, Member States should elaborate a comprehensive action plan that aims at strengthening the economic situation of the forest sector while identifying ways to maintain the important ecological functions of forests and enhance the use of wood products.

4. INVESTING IN THE FUTURE GENERATIONS

- The wood industries are still suffering from an unjustified negative image which affects its attractiveness. To some extent, this explains the difficulties in hiring and retaining young people. Thus, Member States and local communities should be encouraged to communicate to the society and to the young generations the importance of the forestry and forest-based industries, while showcasing their correlated innovative and sustainable character.

