

Reply to the Public Consultation on a Strategy for long-term EU GHG emissions reductions

5 October 2018

The Woodworking Industries welcome the initiative of the European Commission to develop an EU's long-term strategy that will enable the Union to fulfil its obligations under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The objective set by the Agreement - to keep the global temperature increase well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels – can be reached only through a transition to a low-carbon and circular bio-economy. **European Woodworking industries play a major role in the climate change mitigation challenge, while at the same time fuelling green growth and ensuring employment stability, especially in rural areas.**

✓ *Consider the carbon storage and material substitution effects of harvested wood products*

Wood is used to build houses, furniture, flooring, shipping containers, packaging and many other products. The production and processing of wood is highly energy-efficient, giving wood products a low carbon footprint. The **carbon storage effect** of harvested wood products and the **material substitution** effects for energy-intensive fossil-based materials are key arguments for facilitating an increased production and use of wood products within the EU Strategy for Long-term GHG emissions reduction:

- Every cubic meter of wood used in buildings has captured almost one ton of CO₂ from the atmosphere; the carbon stored in wood is fixed in products until they decay or they are burned.
- Moreover, every cubic meter of wood used as a substitute for other functionally equivalent building materials with higher energy content (concrete, bricks, steel) reduces CO₂ emissions by an average of one ton.
- Finally, the stored energy in wood biomass can be recovered when used as renewable energy in substitution of fossil fuels.

Therefore, one effective way to improve the carbon balance is to use a greater proportion of wood products in substitution of fossil-based products, to use wood products with a longer useful life and to increase recycling. Use of products made from sustainably sourced wood can make a significant contribution to mitigating climate change in the longer term, because it avoids the introduction of new carbon into the active carbon cycle, while supplying essential goods and services to our society.

Opportunities for stimulating the use of wood products should be explored by Member States as it will facilitate reducing CO₂ emissions and achieving climate targets. For instance, a mere 4% increase in the output of Europe's Woodworking Industries would store 150 additional million tons of CO₂, which are equivalent to 3% of European GHG emissions. The increased use of forests and wood products can also provide broader social, economic and environment benefits: a 4% increase in the output would lead to the creation of 80,000 new jobs and €2.35 billion to the EU's economy.

✓ *Ensure continuous mobilization of wood from sustainably managed forests*

Forest resources have been growing in the EU. Woodworking Industries have committed to **sustainable management** that ensures development of forest resources also in the future. In order to contribute to the transition to a low-carbon EU economy, woodworking industries need to rely on **a stable and increased availability of raw material**.

While forest policy in the EU is under Member States' competence, EU common policies should support continuous and increasing mobilization of wood raw material from sustainable sources, industrial side-streams and forest residues that benefit the development of circular bio-economy.

By ensuring forest regeneration after harvesting and active and timely management of forests the **production of wood and other ecosystem services** is ensured at the same time and over generations of trees and human beings; in this way, forest related activities do not undermine the environmental integrity of the system.

✓ *Increase the use of wood in construction*

One of the most effective ways to benefit from the environmental advantages of wood is to increase the share of timber constructions and of wood in buildings. Half the world's seven billion people are in urban areas today, and futurists predict that by 2050, 75% of the people on earth will live and work in cities. The challenge is to find quality, affordable, and environmentally friendly housing for these billions of city dwellers.

In addition, the **building sector has a significant GHG emissions reduction potential**: currently buildings are responsible for approximately 40% of energy consumption and 36% of CO₂ emissions in the EU. More specifically, 23% of emissions in EU are caused by building materials. Significant improvements are needed to transition to a low-carbon economy, and the timber construction sector offers a viable solution to this challenge.

Timber construction has a great potential to expand or increase existing buildings in cities. Thanks to the lightweight design, existing foundations do not need to be reinforced. However, there are still obstacles to wood constructions, and regulatory adjustments are needed to ensure a fair competition.

Moreover, when tackling GHG emissions in construction, EU policies should not only focus on energy performance of buildings during use phase, but also consider the energy used for extraction, production and transportation of the building materials. Timber buildings and wooden construction products constitute an excellent choice in this respect, as the total amount of energy required to manufacture, transport and assemble a building product is lower than other construction technologies.

Furthermore, wood in construction is a highly energy-efficient material, offering good insulation properties and reducing the energy use of the building for heating and cooling. Finally, the recycling of wood waste, through reshaping (e.g. from structural wood to floorings) or reprocessing as fibrous materials into wood-based panels or other innovative applications, prolong the C-storage of wood.

Consequently, the **use of natural, easily recyclable or recycled materials in construction should be actively promoted at both national and European level**, while obstacles to the full growth of the sector should be removed.

- ✓ *Focus on additional innovation and funding for efficient technologies and new wood-based products*

Forests provide raw material that is reusable and recyclable, and **wood is used to produce a broad range of traditional as well as new innovative products for daily living** that are making it increasingly possible to substitute many products currently made of non-renewable and fossil raw materials.

EU funding will be needed to support the bio-economy innovation projects in the long run and to find new applications for traditional renewable materials. For example, the development of new, innovative, marketable hardwood products is one important and demanding challenge in the wood sector. Research financing should also address technical solutions to overcome the regulations hampering the use of wood in construction (e.g. on fire safety) and of other wood-based products. Moreover, the wood sector consists of many small and medium sized companies with limited resources, and therefore, the availability of the research and innovation funding for them is of crucial importance.

CEI-Bois, the European Confederation of Woodworking Industries, represents 23 European and National organizations from 15 countries and is the Organization backing the interests of the whole industrial European wood sector: more than 180.000 companies generating an annual turnover of 122 billion euros and employing 1 million workers in the EU.