

EUSTAFOR Position Paper (1) on the Role of Forests and Forest Products in the Post-2020 EU Climate Change Policy Framework

How can European state forests contribute to post-2020 EU climate policy targets?

Brussels, 5 July 2016

Background

Forests and sustainable forest management (SFM) continue to be firmly on the international climate change agenda. At the COP 21 conference, 195 countries agreed on the first universal and legally-binding global climate deal. The ambitious agreement aims to limit the global temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century. Article 5 of the Paris Agreement (2) contains strong recognition of the role of forests and SFM in mitigating climate change.

While the Paris Agreement does not enter into force until 2020, its influence is already being felt. In March 2015 the EU Commission initiated a public consultation on CO₂ emissions from Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) and its communication to the European Council and European Parliament is expected by mid-2016.

There are significant differences between the Member States in terms of forest cover and natural conditions for forest management, as well as in the climate change mitigation potential of their forests. The European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR) shares the opinion that, whichever policy choice is made by the EU, it should take full account of the diversity of special features of forests and forest products as well as the diversified approaches to SFM across the EU. If successfully implemented, SFM, in connection with widespread use of timber products, can offer a means to counteract climate change and to make the transition towards low-carbon bio-based societies and economies.

It is of utmost importance that sustainable and multifunctional forest management is recognized by EU policies as an important part of the global solution for climate change mitigation. Future policy design, targets and implementation details must allow European forests and the forestry sector to realize their full potential.

¹ Any statement in this document is to be considered as a reflection of the best available professional expertise and does not necessarily reflect the political commitments of individual member organizations.

² http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf

European forests – a growing resource to counteract climate change

In 2015, the size of forests and other wooded lands in the EU-28 was approximately 182 million hectares, which corresponds to 41 % of the total land area. The EU's forests and other wooded lands are approximately as large as the land area used for agriculture (3). Each year Europe's forests sequester approximately 435 million tons of CO₂, which is roughly equivalent to 10 % of the EU's total annual greenhouse gas emissions in 2012 (4). When Harvested Wood Products are taken into account, this adds a further 44 million tons of CO₂ or an additional 1 % of total emissions. The material substitution effect of wood products can be estimated to avoid some 90 million tons of CO₂ or a further 2 % of total EU greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, forests and the forest sector are estimated to achieve an overall climate mitigation of around 13 % of total EU emissions.

European forests are a steadily growing and improving resource. The most recent Forest Europe Report (5) shows that the total area of forests in Europe has increased to 215 million hectares over the last 25 years and continues to expand every year by 0,4 %. State forest management organizations have provided leadership in sustainable forest management in Europe. According to recent statistics, forests managed by EUSTAFOR's members (6) are growing at an annual rate of 200 million cubic meters. Of this, 60-70 % is harvested to supply wood-based industries and the bioenergy sector, while the remainder accumulates as growing stock. This currently unused growth reserve can be utilized in the future.

As a result of sustainable forest management practices the ecology of European state forests is good and continuously improving.

Wood – a sustainable and renewable resource to move beyond fossil fuels and build a vibrant bioeconomy

Every cubic meter of wood used to substitute for other non-renewable building materials reduces CO₂ emissions to the atmosphere by an average of 1,9 tons of CO₂ (7). The wood used in construction materials stores carbon for an average period of 80 years. Increased use of wood in construction and more advanced use of wood in emerging sectors can create new markets and new forest-based value chains while at the same time fight climate change.

Bioenergy currently represents 60 % of the EU's total consumption of renewables and its share is expected to grow by 2030. The majority of bioenergy in Europe is generated from biomass that originates from sustainably managed forests. Constantly developing forest resources justify the statement that there is significant potential for the increased sustainable mobilization of forest biomass in Europe.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Forestry_statistics

⁴ Gert-Jan Nabuurs, Philippe Delacote, David Ellison, Marc Hanewinkel, Marcus Lindner, Martin Nesbit, Markku Ollikainen and Annalisa Savaresi. 2015. A new role for forests and the forest sector in the EU post-2020 climate targets. From Science to Policy 2. European Forest Institute.

⁵ <http://www.foresteurope.org/docs/fullsoef2015.pdf>

⁶ Internal EUSTAFOR database

⁷ Sathre, R. and J. O'Connor. 2010. A Synthesis of Research on Wood Products and Greenhouse Gas Impacts, 2nd Ed., Vancouver, B.C., FPInnovations, p.117 (Technical report TR-19R).

The Paris Agreement sets out a plan to effectively decarbonize economies by mid-century. European forests and forest-based products are well positioned to be at the core of the EU climate change agenda. Sustainably produced forest products can help to diversify the energy supply, lower greenhouse gas emissions and create jobs and growth in rural areas. State forests can play a leading role in the development of a vibrant European bioeconomy.

Inclusion of forests and the land-use sector in the post-2020 EU climate policy

A recent EFI study ⁽⁸⁾ has shown that there is a great opportunity to enhance the role of EU forests in tackling climate change. Member States could achieve a combined additional effect of 400 million tons of CO₂ per year by 2030, which translates into another 9 % of total emissions. EUSTAFOR and its members share the view that the mitigation potential of the LULUCF sector should be fully utilized by the EU post-2020 climate policy and are committed to playing a leading role in meeting the climate change challenge.

The EU has already decided that emissions and removals from LULUCF are to be included in its 2030 climate policy framework and policy options for how to do this are currently being considered by the Commission ⁽⁹⁾. It is important for EUSTAFOR that, whichever policy choices are made, they recognize the contribution from forests and sustainable forest management as well as from forest products and bioenergy in a comprehensive and holistic manner. European forests contribute to climate change mitigation by increasing CO₂ removals either in already-existing forests or by expanding forest cover. Furthermore, European forests and forest-based products significantly contribute to reducing emissions through replacing fossil fuels and other highly energy consuming materials. In addition, CO₂ can be stored in wood products for long time spans, depending on the life cycles of individual products. All these mitigation actions are equally important and must be properly addressed by the EU's future policy.

Discussions on the role of forests and forest management in the context of climate change must take into consideration a broad overview, including the need for forest ecosystems – and therefore forest management – to adapt to changes in the climate. Due attention must be paid to the resilience of forests and their long-term continuous provision of ecosystems services.

It must be emphasized that there are no “one size fits all” solutions in the forestry sector. Instead there is a need to respond to a wide variety of contexts. Forests managed by EUSTAFOR members span three major biogeographic zones with different species, growth rates and management traditions. The resulting variations in growth potentials and in forest utilization rates in the various value chains create a wide range of options for climate change mitigation across EUSTAFOR members. EUSTAFOR therefore promotes an approach which utilizes these different regional characteristics. EU post-2020 LULUCF policy must take into account site-specific

⁸ Gerf-Jan Nabuurs, et al

⁹ [Consultation on addressing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and LULUCF in the context of the 2030 EU climate and energy framework](#)

conditions as well as the particular socio-economic circumstances of forest management in individual Member States.

It therefore follows that a flexible and holistic approach should also serve as a guiding principle for designing the elements of future accounting rules, including nationally-determined reference levels, which take into account recent developments of policies that either directly or indirectly impact forests. When designing climate mitigation measures, a balanced approach must be taken on more than one level. On the one hand, concerning land use, decisions must ensure a balance between afforestation versus the sustainable management of already existing resources. On the other hand, concerning carbon storage, the promotion of the sink function of forests must be balanced with the use of forests and thus the provision of long-lasting Harvested Wood Products, which also retain carbon for longer periods.

Conclusion

EUSTAFOR and its members are strongly convinced that forests, forestry and forest-based products not only have a great potential to contribute but are also an essential part of the global solution to climate change mitigation.

EUSTAFOR supports the full integration of forests, forestry and forest-based products in the 2030 climate policy framework as long as the latter is designed in a way which takes into account the special features of forests and their management, thus allowing the sector to realize its fullest potential to mitigate climate change.

EUSTAFOR believes that the services provided by forest owners and managers for climate change mitigation must be properly recognized and valued. EUSTAFOR supports a model that creates multiple avenues for the downward distribution of investment rewards.

EUSTAFOR is committed to contributing to the further development of the EU-wide LULUCF policy, including accounting rules for removals and emissions, and the development of a consistent and harmonized LULUCF reporting format.

EUSTAFOR acknowledges the importance of the general public's support for sustainably managed forests and is committed to developing communications aimed at increasing public understanding of the role of forests in meeting the challenge of climate change.

EUSTAFOR's 30 members (state forest organizations managing state forests) represent around one third of the EU forest area. They are committed to sustainable forest management and work with the existing forest certification schemes. The total harvest of EUSTAFOR members is over 120 million m³ of round timber per annum and together they employ more than 100 000 individuals.

For further information please contact the EUSTAFOR office (office@eustafor.eu) or consult our website at www.eustafor.eu.