

EUSTAFAFOR¹ Response to the European Commission Communication on Integrated Wildfire Risk Management

The European State Forest Association (EUSTAFAFOR) welcomes the European Commission's [Communication on integrated wildfire risk management](#) as an important and timely step towards strengthening Europe's collective response to the growing wildfire challenge.

We celebrate the strong emphasis placed on the landscape-level approach, the recognition of regional and local management as a cornerstone of wildfire risk reduction as it was highlighted in our previous [EUSTAFAFOR Approach for an Integrated Wildfire Risk Management](#) statement. Additionally, the acknowledgement of the role of forest managers and other land-based actors is highly positive and reflects a necessary shift towards addressing the root causes of wildfire risk. These are crucial and signal a positive step to building a sound and effective preventive framework. It rightly emphasises opportunities for co-financing, notably through the Common Agricultural Policy and other EU funding instruments. This represents a valuable opportunity to scale up preventive measures and support long-term resilience across Europe's forested landscapes.

Furthermore, EUSTAFAFOR acknowledges the extensive and ongoing work undertaken by the Commission in the field of wildfire management, particularly coordination and knowledge-sharing initiatives, as regards to preparedness, prevention and extinction of wildfires. These efforts are essential in building a stronger European framework for cooperation.

Addressing High-Intensity Wildfires

There are, however, still important opportunities to further strengthen the approach, particularly in relation to high-intensity wildfires, which are increasingly affecting large parts of Europe, and especially in Mediterranean countries.

While the Communication adopts a broad, ecosystem-based perspective, it is important to note that the relative relevance and effectiveness of the proposed measures may vary significantly across different fire regimes and territorial contexts. In particular, as regards to the nature protection and restoration; certain ecosystem-specific actions and recommendations highlighted in the Communication, while valuable in their respective environmental contexts, such as wetlands, peatlands, rivers and floodplain restoration, may have limited impact in the most fire-prone landscapes, such as the Mediterranean ones, where extreme wildfire behaviour is driven by fuel continuity, accumulation, and increasingly severe climatic conditions. In an ecosystem-based restoration approach, policy priorities and recommended actions need to be closely aligned with the specific drivers of high-intensity wildfires beyond.

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 organisations.

Policy Coherence and Cross-Sectoral Integration

One positive approach is the integrated ambition of the Communication and its links to multiple EU policy areas. Nonetheless, there is still an opportunity to further strengthen policy coherence and cross-sectoral coordination. Effective wildfire risk management remains at the intersection of forest policy, agriculture, rural development, climate adaptation, biodiversity, and civil protection. Bridging these policy domains more explicitly would help ensure that objectives are aligned and mutually reinforcing. Closer integration between prevention-oriented land management policies, conservation and emergency response frameworks, as well as stronger links with bioeconomy and rural development strategies, would enhance the overall effectiveness and long-term sustainability of the approach. Developing a true integration across these policy areas remains a key aspect.

The Correlation Between Forest Management and Infrastructure

In this regard, EUSTAfor underlines the critical importance of active and sustainable forest management across the entire territory and landscape as a key tool to reduce fuel loads, limit fuel continuity, and enhance overall landscape resilience. This should be complemented by strategic preventive and adaptive silviculture and targeted fuel management practices, which play a direct role in facilitating and improving the effectiveness of firefighting operations, particularly those carried out by ground-based forces. Equally, the development and maintenance of well-functioning infrastructure networks, including forest roads, access routes, and strategically placed fuel breaks, water reservoirs, etc, are essential to ensure safe, timely, and effective intervention. Together, these elements form the operational backbone for addressing high-intensity wildfire scenarios and could be more strongly emphasised within the overall framework.

Bioeconomy and Long-Term Sustainability

There is significant potential to further strengthen landscape resilience and forest fire prevention by recognising and promoting more explicitly the role of the forest-based bioeconomy as a key enabler of effective and sustained wildfire prevention. While aware of the current parallel work on the New Bioeconomy strategy, it is necessary to link wildfire management closer to the Bioeconomy. A strong Bioeconomy driven by sustainable forest management not only contributes to reducing wildfire risk through fuel reduction and improved stand structure, but also generates income from renewable, value-added products, which can be next re-invested into well-functioning forestry and industrial systems.

Importantly, the development of viable bio-based value chains creates economic incentives for active forest management in local landscapes, which is essential to ensure that preventive measures are implemented consistently over time and across large areas. Without such incentives, many forests, particularly in less economically attractive regions, risk being abandoned, leading to fuel accumulation and increased vulnerability to high-intensity wildfires.

Strengthening further the link between wildfire risk management, rural development, and the bioeconomy can provide a more sustainable and scalable solution. By supporting markets for forest-based products, encouraging innovation, and improving the profitability of forest operations, the EU can help ensure that prevention is not only technically sound but also economically viable in the long term.



Rebalancing Prevention and Response

More broadly, while the Communication addresses preparedness and emergency response from a Civil Protection perspective, it is important to highlight that prevention should be further reinforced and duly supported economically as a central pillar. Building resilient forests and economically viable systems and landscapes is the foundation upon which effective suppression and emergency response depend.

Knowledge Sharing and Reference Centres

The proposal to develop a reference centre in Cyprus is highly valuable. There is strong potential and added value in this initiative. Furthermore, we encourage the development of a broader network of complementary reference centres across Europe that also reflects the diversity of European fire regimes and provide specialised expertise on the whole cycle of prevention, preparedness, suppression and restoration strategies adapted to different ecological and operational contexts.

Conclusion

This Communication is a positive and necessary step forward and can serve as an opportunity to deepen collaboration and to ensure that prevention, sustainable forest management, and landscape resilience are fully integrated into Europe's wildfire and climate resilience strategies. EUSTAFOR stands ready to actively support the European Commission by facilitating dialogue among its members as well as sharing practical experience, case studies, best practices, and contributing with long-standing expertise in forest management and wildfire prevention from 40 state forest management organisations across Europe.