



Brussels, 16 July 2021

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

The new EU Forest Strategy – putting European forest owners' commitment at stake

Today, the European Commission published its EU Forest Strategy for 2030. Despite some improvements, the text adopted does not succeed in re-balancing the previous versions of the text that have already caused controversy. The strategy puts European forest owners' commitment at stake, as it does not strike a balance between the various functions of forests, between risks and opportunities, and lacks comprehensive concrete actions to support the forest sector.

European forest owners acknowledge the strategy's positive statements on the role of forest owners but despite them the Commission published today an unbalanced strategy that hampers the multifunctionality of the EU forests and questions existing and successful sustainable forest management in the EU. Furthermore, forest owners' expectation on the strategy's role as a coordination tool regarding all forest-related EU policies has not been fulfilled. The numerous calls from forest owners, the forest sector, MEPs and Member States have not been heard in the Commission.

"The strategy is a real disappointment for European forest owners. Unfortunately, they feel that it is based more on ideology and emotions than their everyday reality. Forest owners' endorsement and motivation are crucial for the implementation of any forest-related ideas and measures. The adopted text does not allow such endorsement. Forest owners see their role in reaching the Green Deal targets and want to work together towards the goal, but they need a holistic political framework that supports their work." says **Fanny-Pomme Langue**, CEPF Secretary General on behalf of a coalition including Copa-Cogeca and ELO.

Most of the EU forests are privately owned. Therefore, this strategy and its objectives can only be implemented with a real acknowledgement and respect of those that have been their caretakers for generations and of their ownership rights. Forest owners are choosing the most appropriate forest management option for their land within the limits already set by national legislation and sustainable forward-looking principles. As expressed by several forest owners in the "Welcome to my forest" campaign, the climate change is the greatest challenge that forests and forest owners face and the only thing that's certain is uncertainty. What forest owners need is political, societal and economic support for their work and efforts, not a strategy that creates even more uncertainty.

A clear example that illustrates the gap between the strategy and the needs of forest owners is the fact that there is no specific chapter on climate change adaptation and mitigation nor on financing beyond environmental services. In addition, the actions proposed are mainly focused on one aspect of the sustainability: the environmental one.

To the diversity of EU forests and their history, management and ownership, and to the main challenge that climate change, the strategy answers with a rather prescriptive and one-size-fits all approach. Calls for an additional closer-to-nature certification scheme, advertisement of Natura 2000 logo for non-wood products, recommendations to avoid specific practices, narrow approach on bioeconomy: none of these are answering to the demands of the sector. On the contrary, they may put at risk sustainable management of forests, undermine the manifold services for environment and society and forests' contribution to mitigate climate change with more regulatory burden and less sources of income from forest management.

Furthermore, through opening the door to new EU forest management indicators and thresholds, the strategy is putting at stake the pan-European Forest Europe process which the EU is part of. Linked to this, the new legislative proposal for EU Forest Observation, Reporting and Data Collection announced in the strategy and the strategic plans is not only challenging Member States' competence on forestry but also raising a lot of questions from forest owners regarding the ultimate political objective and implementation of such initiative.

The undersigned organisations look forward to reading the reactions from the Council and the Parliament to the new strategy, whose positions have unfortunately not been considered. European Forest Owners are strongly committed to play their role in reaching the Green Deal targets provided that the appropriate political framework is in place.

For more information, contact:

Susanna Kallio, Communications Manager, CEPF

susanna.kallio@cepf-eu.org

Jean-Baptiste Boucher, Communications Director, Copa-Cogeca

jean-baptiste.boucher@copa-cogeca.eu

Ana Rocha, Senior Policy Officer, ELO

ana.rocha@elo.org