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Forest Monitoring Law: how, by whom and for what?

Brussels, November 22, 2023 — Today, the European Commission published its regulation establishing a "Forest Monitoring Law". ELO welcomes the general principle of increasing the resilience of European forests, particularly in the face of climate change. There is a need to provide tools and information to landowners and land managers to prepare our forests for the future. However, the proposal does not provide a framework to achieve the general objective that frames it.

The proposal focuses on collecting data related to one of the three pillars of sustainability and lacks clarity regarding issues such as data ownership, potential future interpretations, and uses. Jurgen Tack, Secretary General of ELO, remarked, "Ensuring the resilience of European forests is undoubtedly crucial, and furnishing forest owners and managers with pertinent data is a significant step. However, the data should accurately reflect ownership rights and the multifunctionality of European forests. It appears doubtful that the forest monitoring framework unveiled today aligns with these objectives."

The framework stipulates that the EU and Member States should individually cover specific aspects of forest monitoring, relying on standardised remote sensing and in situ data collection. Consequently, it minimizes the importance of existing international monitoring systems, overlooking established methods and data that already facilitate an integrated approach to forests as multifunctional ecosystems. These existing systems tailor instruments to local specificities, and there is a risk of duplicating the efforts of current inventory systems. Instead, emphasis should be placed on supporting ongoing initiatives for harmonization, comparability,

and standardization. This approach would facilitate experience exchange, benchmarking, and knowledge transfers at the EU level.

The framework specifies the data to be collected and integrated, encompassing non-binding or non-commonly agreed-upon definitions and methodologies. It even introduces new concepts without prior justification. Although the proposed text extensively outlines the forest data to be collected, it lacks specificity regarding the proposed governance, referencing 'specialized bodies' without providing detailed information. ELO believes that governance should revolve around a partnership between the European Commission, Member States, and relevant international processes. This partnership-oriented approach ensures effective coordination and collaboration in the governance structure.

There is also a lack of clarity concerning the justification and objectives of incorporating voluntary integrated long-term plans within the context of a legally binding instrument.

In conclusion, ELO emphasizes the need for an inclusive and transparent process at all stages of the proposal's development and implementation. This process should actively involve forest owners instead of relying excessively on the proposed secondary legislation. By engaging forest owners directly, a more comprehensive and well-informed approach to the development and implementation of the proposal can be achieved.

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About the European Landowners' Organization (ELO)

The European Landowners' Organization (ELO) is a leading voice representing the interests of landowners, rural entrepreneurs, and rural land managers in Europe. ELO promotes sustainable land management practices, fosters innovation, and advocates for the recognition of landowners' crucial role in shaping Europe's landscapes and rural areas.

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