

Forests: protection and monitoring of atmospheric pollution and fires, action 2003-2008

Forest Focus

2002/0164(COD) - 26/08/2010 - Follow-up document

The Commission presents its final report on the implementation of the Forest Focus scheme according to Regulation (EC) No 2152/2003 concerning monitoring of forests and environmental interactions in the Community (Forest Focus).

The Forest Focus Regulation aimed to establish a scheme for long term monitoring of the condition and of the environmental interactions on forests in the European Union. The scheme included the continuation of the existing monitoring networks on air pollution and its impacts on forests, forest fires, their causes and effects and the co financing of forest fire prevention activities. It also broadened the scope of EU forest monitoring through the gathering of information on soils, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, climate change effects and protective functions of forests.

As mentioned in the January 2008 report, the implementation of the Forest Focus Regulation took more time than the four years envisaged. This report complements the previous one and mainly aims at reporting on the use of the Forest Focus budget.

Results: in general, **the objectives have been fulfilled** and the high implementation rate can be considered as a success. Former forest monitoring and forest fire prevention legislation has been given an integrated approach by Forest Focus. Under the scheme, the **Forest Focus database** has been created and contains aggregated data and information on the state of EU forests.

The delay in setting up the scheme has caused problems for the national competent bodies in charge of the implementation of the activities in the national programmes. However, only in exceptional cases were part of the activities withdrawn from what was initially planned. Forest-related information has been gathered, notably on soil and biodiversity, broadening the scope of forest monitoring for the first time. The information on soils and above ground biodiversity form part of the **Biosoil database** established under the scheme.

A significant percentage of the funding was provided for the development of research studies and demonstration projects on biodiversity, carbon stocks, forest soil biodiversity, forest fires, ozone, climate change, genetic diversity, fungi, lichens and other forest related issues.

As regards forest fires, the **European Forest Fire Information System, EFFIS**, has been established and further developed under the scheme. Especially noteworthy are the modules on Natura 2000 and forests, estimated atmospheric emissions or post fire soil erosion that were created. EFFIS is now a core element of European forest fire monitoring and its maintenance is assured until the end of 2010 by means of a pilot project requested by the European Parliament.

Financial Implementation: from the total budget of the scheme (EUR 65 million), a total amount of EUR 56,468,222 was allocated to perform the national programmes. A total of EUR 7,587,586 was allocated for the agreement with the Joint Research Centre, the execution of the mid term review of the scheme, the agreement with ICP-Forest, and for the expert meetings and conferences.

A total amount of **EUR 53,342,555.09** was spent on the scheme. The activities in the national programmes accounted for EUR 45,772,306.10 and the rest of the Forest Focus budget was EUR 7,570,248.99.

An analysis of the expenditure per activity shows that the **larger part of the funding, 43% has gone to the intensive air pollution monitoring** (Level II network). Following in magnitude, 32% has gone on studies and demonstration projects. 11% was spent in forest fire related activities. The systematic Level I monitoring network used only 9% of the total budget and 5% of the budget went to coordination and management activities.

The assessment of the expenditure by Member State and activity shows that most of the financial resources were devoted to the intensive monitoring of forest health, followed by the development of studies and demonstration projects and by fire monitoring activities.

Conclusions: a number of conclusions can be drawn from on the implementation of the scheme:

- **forest monitoring in the EU** has devoted the majority of its financing resources to the intensive monitoring network (Level II). This network does not provide enough representative information on the state of EU forests and the resources and funds deployed in such a network are very high;
- **traditional crown condition monitoring** has been gathered already for 20 years since EU forests started showing symptoms of acid rain damage. Latest results have shown that forest condition is more stable nowadays and that sulphur content levels have decreased whilst nitrogen levels remain stable. Crown condition can still be considered as a representative and cost effective indicator for the state of forests. Nevertheless, it gives rough information on forest health and it should be complemented with other information on visible damage;
- **other indicators should be included** in future forest monitoring systems, using networks that provide consistent information at EU level;
- **forest soil and biodiversity monitoring** should be continued in the future, as they deliver crucial information for EU policy making, but also for contributing to international conventions, such as the UNCCC or the CBD.

With regard to **forest fires** and in the absence of a legal basis, the question of how to assure continuation of EFFIS and the Commission's expert group on forest fires will need to be addressed in the context of the new financial perspectives and on the Green Paper on forest protection and information.

The Forest Focus Regulation was repealed in 2006 by the [Life+ Regulation](#) (EC) No 614/2007. So far, there is one forest monitoring project ongoing under the Life+ Regulation, conceived for a two-year period only (2009 and 2010) and unlike the Forest Focus scheme, it is based on a voluntary approach.

The [Green Paper](#) adopted on 1 March 2010 presents the current state of play of EU forests and sets out the main challenges they face as regards climate change, as part of the follow-up to the [White Paper on adapting to climate change](#). It also refers to existing forest information systems and the tools to protect forests, and raises a series of questions relevant to the development of future policy options. A public consultation, to which this report may contribute, is open until end of July 2010. The follow up to the Forest Focus Regulation, the more recent action under Life+ and the wider issue of forest monitoring will be taken into consideration in the context of the next steps after the Green Paper