

New EU forest strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector

2014/2223(INI) - 07/04/2015 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted the own-initiative report by Elisabeth KÖSTINGER (PPE, AT) on ‘A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector’.

The Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety exercised its prerogative as an associated committee in line with [Article 54 of the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament](#), was also consulted for an opinion on this report.

Members welcomed the Commission communication on a new EU forest strategy and the accompanying working documents, and stressed that an EU forest strategy must i) focus on the **sustainable management of forests** and their multifunctional role from the economic, social and environmental viewpoints and ii) must ensure **better coordination and communication of Community policies directly or indirectly linked to forestry**.

The parliamentary committee oppose any attempt to make forestry a matter of EU policy and demand that the sector’s local and regional basis and the competence of the Member States in this be respected.

The report stresses the important role of the sustainable production and use of timber for the development of **sustainable economic models and the creation of green jobs**. It calls on the Commission to analyse the difficulties in the downstream supply chain related to increased demand from third countries, particularly for roundwoods, and to support this sector.

Given that around **60% of the EU’s forests** are private, with about 16 million private forest owners, Members underline the importance of ownership and property rights and supports all measures enabling stakeholder groups to participate in a dialogue on reinforcing and implementing sustainable forest management and improve the exchange of information.

Resource efficiency – timber as a sustainable raw material (sustainable forest management): the report stresses that both the use of timber as a renewable raw material and sustainable forest management have an important role to play in the achievement of the EU’s socio-political goals such as the energy transition, climate mitigation and adaptation to it. Lack of active forest management would be inimical to these goals.

Members support **the resource-efficient use of timber as a renewable, versatile raw material** with limited availability, and oppose legally binding rules for prioritising the uses of wood.

The report supports the Commission’s intention to develop, together with the Member States and stakeholders, **an ambitious, objective and demonstrable set of criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of forests**. They underline that these criteria should be aligned with the requirements of *Forest Europe* towards a ‘**European Forest Convention**’ as a binding framework for sustainable forest management and for improving the balance of interests in forest policy. They call on the Member States and the Commission to make all necessary efforts to resume these negotiations and drive them forward to a successful conclusion.

Members consider that forest management plans can be important strategic instruments for the implementation of sustainable forest management in European forests. The Member States, in line with

the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, are called on to monitor and **promote the implementation of the forest management plans without creating unnecessary administrative burdens**. The forest management plans and the management plans under Natura 2000 should remain separate.

Research and development – education and training: the report stresses the significant role that the bioeconomy plays in terms of achieving the Commission's new priorities of growth, employment and investment. The bioeconomy represented in 2009 a market estimated to be worth over EUR 2 trillion, providing 20 million jobs and accounting for 9 % of total employment in the EU.

The Commission is called on: i) to assess, from the point of view of forestry and wood working priorities, the European R&D programmes (Horizon 2020) and the programme for the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (COSME); ii) to develop new instruments for the forest-based sector; and iii) to promote targeted research into cost-effective solutions for new and innovative timber products to support the development of the sustainable wood-based bioeconomy.

Members called on the Commission and the Member States to devise measures and, where possible, to use existing European instruments **to support generation renewal and compensate for the skilled workforce shortage in the forests**.

In addition, they judge it important: i) to promote the sustainable use of forest products in the **construction** sector, including application to the construction of more affordable houses built from sustainably sourced raw materials; ii) to encourage scientific research work oriented towards **rational use of biomass**.

Global challenges - environment and climate change: the Commission and the Member States are called on to take specific action with a view to achieving Aichi Target 5, under which the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, **should be at least halved by 2020 and where feasible brought close to zero**.

Members expressed serious concern at the pace of world deforestation, particularly in developing countries. They called on the Commission to develop an **action plan on deforestation and forest degradation**. They take the view that certain issues affect the forestry industry at global level, particularly illegal felling, and therefore calls on the Commission to reinforce support for the forestry industry among the associated international bodies.