

Strasbourg, 17 May 2022

Joint statement on the place of wood in bioeconomy for the EU Forest Directors meeting on the 17th May

European forest owners and managers see bioeconomy as a crucial component in the efforts to tackle climate change, that remains the most important challenge for society now and in the future. We are part of the solution and are willing to decarbonise European economy to fulfil the objectives of the Paris Agreement. Therefore, we will continue our efforts to provide sustainably harvested wood as one of the most important material to substitute fossil-based products and fuels. In addition, this development will also provide great opportunities for economic growth and better life in local communities by, among other things, enhancing competitiveness and creating new jobs, especially in rural and remote areas of Europe.

We strongly believe that the forest sector must continue to play a key role in the EU bioeconomy. Renewable biomaterials, such as sustainably sourced wood, have a great potential to displace carbon and reduce dependence on fossil fuels if they are used to substitute non-renewable and fossil-based products and energy. Forests provide the largest share of European renewable resources and the promotion of wood as a sustainable, renewable, climate and environmentally friendly raw material is therefore crucial.

Substitution of fossil-based materials like construction materials, plastics or textiles has been successfully implemented with excellent results for environmental, social, and economic sustainability. There are a lot of good examples, but the potential for further developments in this field in the coming decades is tremendous. Therefore, investments in research and innovation are essential to further develop the bio-based economy and create new processes and products or to improve the existing ones. Adequate financial resources need to be deployed for this and for investments in infrastructure, logistics, technologies, and skills.

Our forests can respond to the increasing demand for wood in a sustainable way. However, one of the challenges that we still face today is wood mobilisation and the need to increase managed forest areas, as there is a considerable amount of sustainable supply of woody biomass that is unused in certain EU regions in particular, due to the cost of management and the low income generated (only 63% of the annual increment in the EU was harvested in 2019 – Eurostat).

Bioeconomy developments go hand in hand with responding to all the other needs of society, including expected environmental benefits and the respect of ecological boundaries which forest owners are aware of and responsible for in their forests. While there might be a trade-off between bioeconomy development and biodiversity conservation, there are also many options for synergies. Indeed, bioeconomy supports sustainable forest management and thus contributes to its biodiversity protection goal and the provision of sustainable natural resources. Such a close relation between the

development of bio-based production and biodiversity conservation should be maintained and promoted

In addition, to further develop the forest-based bioeconomy, we need to promote a bottom-up approach and strengthen the role of local bioeconomies and consider farmers and forest owners as strategic partners along the bio-based value-chains.

The role of forests in developing a bio-based circular economy was presented in the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 more as a risk than an opportunity. Nevertheless, the Strategy correctly highlights the importance of supporting wood in the construction and building sector. However, other uses of wood should be given similar attention. We wish to underline that downstream forest-based industries always seek to optimise the value from forests, and 'long-lived' products are a critical component of this. However, supporting long-lived wood products requires supporting active forest management as a whole, including the production and consumption of other wood-based products such as paper, packaging, and energy.

We hope that the progress report on the EU Bioeconomy Strategy will recognise the efforts made by the whole forest-based sector to innovate and invest in sustainable forest management and bioeconomy.

Signatories:

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European Farmers and Agri-Cooperatives (Copa-Cogeca)