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A Bottom-Up Approach to the Use of Forest Biomass

Joint statement on the EU Non-Binding Guidance on the Cascading Use of Biomass

Forests cover more than 40 percent of the EU's land area. They are essential for life on earth**,** providing the bioeconomy with renewable materials, energy as well as other ecosystem services. Sustainably managed forests and the forest sector play a key role in the transition towards a sustainable circular bioeconomy. Their role is therefore crucial towards achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. Capturing the potential of forests to support economic growth and deliver local and global environmental services will require an economically vital forest sector. At EU level, the role of multifunctional and sustainably managed forests is well recognized by the EU Forest Strategy. The implementation of existing European and national policies, regulations and voluntary tools verify the sustainability of forest biomass sourcing**,** irrespective of its end use.

Resource efficiency is at the core of the multi-purpose use of forest biomass, as the most important product which generates income is high-value timber. Yet, resource allocation is not a static issue as price changes and technological progress may open up new and more efficient uses of raw materials. Moreover, the increase in the availability of forest resources in Europe currently surpasses their use, resulting in about two thirds of the annual increment being harvested. Profitability and innovation in forestry have an important role to play in providing wood and other ecosystem services.

The signing organizations welcome the efforts made by the European Commission with their proposal of a **non-binding guidance on the cascading use of biomass** to improve understanding and share knowledge of best practices with regards to resource efficiency in the bio-based value chains as long as it is well taken into account that:

- Any attempt at any level to introduce a hierarchy in the use of products and by-products would create negative unintended consequences such as market distortions and innovation bottlenecks. These may result in sub-optimal value cycles and would be detrimental to some forestry sub-sectors;
- The diversity of forests and their management in Europe should be recognized, because national and regional circumstances vary greatly in terms of forest resources, industry capacity and development, wood markets and energy systems;
- In order to draw the highest possible values from forests, the full range of uses of biomass should be enhanced.

The introduction of restrictions on the use of biomass will jeopardize the role of the forest sector in the bioeconomy. Therefore, in order to boost a successful transition to a circular bioeconomy, the approach to resource efficiency in the forest-based sector should be bottom-up, market-based and well-grounded in innovation and knowledge exchange.

The forestry sector can catalyze the development of a European-wide bioeconomy in line with the principles of the circular economy. However, this will be possible only if all principles of sustainable forest management are equally recognized and its correlated competitiveness is supported by the EU's forest-related policies and initiatives.

Bioenergy Europe
CEPF – Confederation of European Forest Owners
COPA & COGECA – European Farmers and European Agri-cooperatives
EOS – European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry
EUSTAFOR – European State Forest Association
UEF – Union of European Foresters
USSE – Union of Foresters of Southern Europe