



To:

Mr Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

CC:

Mr Phil Hogan, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Jyrki Katainen, Vice-President of the European Commission

Brussels, 22 June 2016

Subject: Speech by Commissioner Vella at the conference “Beyond wood – the multiple services provided by Europe’s forests”

Dear Commissioner Vella,

On 23 May 2016 you provided a keynote speech with important messages about EU forests and their sustainable management at the event “Beyond wood – the multiple services provided by Europe’s forests”, organized by the Directorate-General on Environment.

The Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF), the European Farmers and European Agri-Cooperatives (COPA and COGECA), the European Landowners’ Organization (ELO), the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR), the European Federation of Municipal Forest Owners (FECOF) and the Union of Forest Owners of Southern Europe (USSE), representing the interests of Europe’s private, communal and state forest owners and managers, welcome the opening statement of your speech, in which you recognize the need to look at the big, overall picture and the multifunctional role of European forests. However, given the significant engagement and efforts made by forest owners and managers to keep Europe’s forests continuously developing and improving, we very much regret and contest your depiction of forest owners as seeking only to maximize their profits and lacking knowledge and interest of other aspects of multifunctional forestry.

Since centuries, millions of forest owners and managers have been looking at the big picture to ensure that their forests can provide market and non-market values to the present and future

generations. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge what the actual situation on the ground is and to give an equal footing to all three pillars of sustainability.

We regret the often one-sided, negative descriptions of Europe's forests that are given, coupled with a lack of comprehension of the importance of sustainable forest management in providing multiple benefits and creating resilient forests. A more realistic understanding of the big picture and the multifunctional management of Europe's forests can be drawn from the latest State of Europe's Forests report by FOREST EUROPE and national forest inventories. From these sources we can see, for example, that Europe is one of the largest roundwood producers in the world, while at the same time more than 50% of forests are designated for the protection of water, soil, ecosystems and infrastructures, that the amount of deadwood in forests is increasing, ranging from 8 to 20 m³/ha, that growing forests sequester carbon corresponding to 9% of EU's total greenhouse gas emissions and that 90% of the forests are available for recreational purposes. Dismissing these facts instead of building on them is simply counterproductive to the objectives of sustainability that we all share.

Multiple benefits are provided by European forest owners and managers, for whom the concept of multifunctional and sustainable forest management is the key for balancing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of forests. Active management implies recognizing that we have different forest ecosystems in different parts of Europe that require adapted management and knowledge. The active management of forests has a more crucial role than ever in contributing to the EU objectives of ensuring sustainable development, maintaining and creating jobs and growth in the EU and decarbonizing the economy.

At the 2nd Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe (since 2011 FOREST EUROPE) in Helsinki 1993, the European forest community manifested their common vision by adopting the pan-European definition and principles¹ of multifunctional sustainable forest management as the only way forward. FOREST EUROPE with its 47 signatories, including the EU, have since then further developed and improved the dynamic concept of multifunctional sustainable forest management.

This is also further re-iterated in the Commission's EU Forest Strategy of 2013, which states that *"forests are multifunctional, serving economic, social and environmental purposes. They offer habitats for animals and plants and play a major role in mitigating climate change and other environmental services. Nearly a quarter of the EU's forest area is protected under Natura 2000, and much of the rest is home to species protected under EU nature legislation. Forests also offer societal benefits, including for human health, recreation and tourism. The socio-economic importance of forests is high, but often underestimated. Forests contribute to rural development and provide around three million jobs. Wood is still the main source of financial revenue from forests. So the strategy also looks at the EU forest-based industries, subject to EU industrial policy. Wood is also considered an important source of raw material for emerging bio-based industries."*

This consensual understanding and development of the concept of multifunctional sustainable forest management is the result of an enormous effort and political compromise, and must therefore be recognized by European institutions and society as a whole. From your recent speech, Mr Commissioner, we understand that DG Environment does not agree with and support this consensual understanding of the SFM concept which raises our serious concerns.

¹ MCPFE Helsinki Resolution 1, 1993

Finally, we welcome your invitation to a solid and structured dialogue and we hope for a fruitful discussion on the holistic picture of Europe's forests and their sustainable management. In this context we would like to invite you, at your convenience, to a field visit to a European forest, in order to give forest owners and managers the possibility to demonstrate and explain, with concrete examples, how multifunctional sustainable forest management works on the ground.

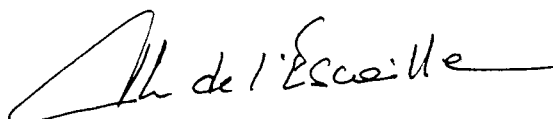
Sincerely yours,



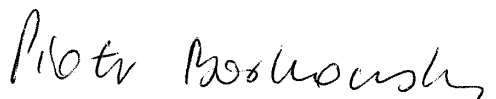
Emma Berglund
Secretary General of CEPF



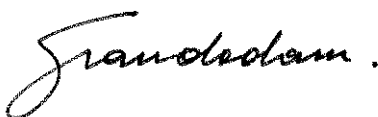
Pekka Pesonen
Secretary General of COPA and COGECA



Thierry de l'Escaille
Secretary General of ELO



Piotr Borkowski
Executive Director of EUSTAFOR



Pierre Grandadam
President of FECOF



Leire Salberria
Executive President of USSE

For further information, please contact:

CEPF: franz.thoma@cepf-eu.org

COPA and COGECA: oana.neagu@copa-cogeca.eu

ELO: ana.rocha@elo.org

EUSTAFOR: piotr.borkowski@eustafor.eu

FECOF: anne.galibert@communesforestieres.org

USSE: usse@usse-eu.org