



## Online Event: Sustainable management of forests - How to seek a balance through EU policies?



Wednesday 27 April 2020, 13:00 - 15:00 CEST  
Online Event

Co-hosted by MEPs Jytte Guteland (S&D), Elsi Katainen (Renew) and Simone Schmiedtbauer (EPP)

### Speakers

- **MEP Elsi Katainen**
- **MEP Jytte Guteland**
- **Isabelle Mellier**, Chair of the Working Party on Forestry, French Ministry of Agriculture
- **Dr. Georg Winkel**, Professor and Chair of the Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group, Wageningen University & Research
- **Dr. Bernhard Wolfslehner**, Head of Governance Programme, European Forest Institute
- **Gaëlle Marion**, Head of B2 Unit on Environmental Sustainability, DG AGRI, European Commission
- **Galena Woodhouse**, Project Manager on Global Biodiversity Standard at BGCI, representing IUCN Species Survival Commission
- **Dr. Peter Mayer**, Director of the Federal Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape (BWF)
- **Joan Calabuig Rull**, Rapporteur for the Opinion on the "EU Forest Strategy for 2030", CoR
- **Simo Tiainen**, Rapporteur for the Opinion on the "New EU Forest Strategy for 2030", EESC
- **Tomáš Krejzar**, Director, Department of Forest Policy and Economics, Ministry of Agriculture, Czech Republic
- **MEP Simone Schmiedtbauer**

## Welcome Remarks

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### *MEP Elsi Katainen*

**“The best practices of Member States should be taken into account regarding the management of forestry.”**

**MEP Elsi Katainen** kicked the event off by emphasizing that **European forests are a key element to reach the Green Deal objectives**. Moving on in her welcome remarks, she observed that **forests in Europe are extremely diverse**, meaning there is no “one size fits all” approach. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the European Parliament is drafting its report on the new EU Forest Strategy. MEP Katainen emphasized that **national best practices regarding the management of forests** should be taken into account. Additionally, in the revision of the Renewable Energy Directive and the Deforestation Regulation, **the European Commission must focus on policy coherence**. To conclude, MEP Katainen underlined that **a stronger voice should be given to European forest owners** in the development of forestry-related policies, and good practices should be made more visible.

### *MEP Jytte Guteland*

**“It is necessary to reach a higher ambition regarding the EU Forest Strategy targets for 2030.”**

**MEP Jytte Guteland** declared that she would like to focus on initiatives and directives with an impact on forests and biodiversity that lie in the future. She emphasized it is necessary to ensure **a good policy mix**, that will help both the forests being a tool to **halt global warming** and which **improves biodiversity** at the same time. Forests must be used not only as carbon sinks but also as **enablers in achieving a circular economy** in Europe. Moving on, the necessity to preserve biodiversity in forests was underlined. At the same time, countries must be allowed to manage their forests in a sustainable way. To conclude, MEP Guteland stressed that **a higher ambition regarding the EU Forest Strategy targets** for 2030 must be reached.

## Interventions

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*Isabelle Mellier, Chair of the Working Party on Forestry, French Ministry of Agriculture*

**“The Council recognized Sustainable Forest Management as a dynamic and evolving concept, providing a framework for balancing the provisioning and enhancement of ecological economics, and the social service of forest and forest ecosystems.”**

In Ms. Isabelle Mellier’s intervention, some key messages of the Council Conclusions regarding the New EU Forest Strategy, adopted in November 2021, were underlined. It was highlighted that **the Council recognized Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) as a dynamic and evolving concept**. At the same time, the Council stressed the importance of SFM as a nature-based solution. Continuing the intervention, Ms. Mellier declared that the Council insisted on the necessity of **taking into account all three dimensions of sustainability** in a balanced and holistic way. At the same time, a **“one size fits all” approach to forests has proven to be counterproductive**. Instead, the need to recognize the diversity and specificities of different forest practices, and the diversity among Member States, was emphasised. Moving on, the concept of convergence was touched upon, as **the Council has agreed upon the need for an inclusive approach and good coordination between EU forestry bodies**. To conclude her intervention, Ms. Mellier observed that the Council also encouraged the **full involvement of relevant stakeholders**, including forest owners and managers in the consultation, preparing the implementation of the Strategy.

After Ms. Mellier’s intervention, a video message from forest managers was played, as provided by EUSTAFOR. The video can be found following this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeJwI ZZbCal&list=PLNwazE4N4NMJLBelWBmiYFD-AksVt9Sb5> .

## Keynote speech

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*Dr. Georg Winkel, Professor and Chair of the Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group, Wageningen University & Research*

**“It is crucial to acknowledge the importance of different forest related objectives and seek alignment.”**

**Dr. Georg Winkel** started his keynote speech by explaining **six challenges of governing Europe's forests** for multiple ecosystem services. However, all these challenges contain opportunities as well. **Two challenges** were given particular attention: **insufficient alignment of forest ecosystem services provision and demand** and **political polarization relating to forests**. **Four solutions** were brought forward to address these challenges. The first solution is to **provide robust data and increase transparency**. To this end, it is necessary to develop a European forest monitoring approach that provides policy-relevant information and makes it publicly available. The second solution is to **highlight policy integration**. As observed by Dr. Winkel: *“it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of different forest-related objectives and seek alignment”*. The third solution is **payment for ecosystem services (PES)**: Dr. Winkel emphasised developing a European PES system to align ecosystem services demand and supply. Lastly, the necessity to **enable bottom-up participation and innovation** was stressed.

After Dr. Winkel's keynote speech, a video message from forest owners was played, as provided by CEPF and COPA-COGECA. The video can be found following this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMNuiM2fmOA>

## Panel Discussion

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To begin the panel discussion, moderator **Ms. Jo O'Hara** addressed the following question to all the panelists: “Where do you see the greatest threats and opportunities for Sustainable Forest Management, in the context of the many policy developments in the EU over the last two years?”

**Dr. Peter Mayer** kicked off the discussion by emphasizing that when it comes to EU policies, a **decentralized forest policy landscape** is in place. Moving on, it was highlighted that **some of the policies in this landscape are single-issue policies**, which do not take into account the complexity of SFM. This leads to **negative effects** when considering rural development or social sustainability. At the same time, it is necessary to identify divergent aspects of forestry management. As opportunities, Dr. Mayer stressed that **the whole forest sector plays an important role in shaping the future for society**, and forest owners and managers need to be active and innovative in shaping this future.

Moving on with the panel discussion, **Ms. Galena Woodhouse** answered that the forest-related targets in the Forest Strategy present fantastic opportunities. Furthermore, there is a **huge potential for biodiversity, conservation, and restoration**. As one of the threats, Ms. Woodhouse identified that **the EU Forest Strategy is not ambitious enough when it comes to the diversity of tree species. Opportunities will be missed** if this diversity is not considered.

As an opportunity, **Ms. Gaëlle Marion** highlighted that **the EU Forest Strategy and its implementation triggers exchanges** that should consolidate a consistent framework. At the same time, it was underlined that under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), **a lot of funding possibilities are available to the Member States**, to support schemes for forest owners, forest communities and area-based management commitments or to finance investments to support innovation in SMEs. To conclude, she observed that **knowledge exchanges can be funded under the CAP**, which is an opportunity that should not be overlooked.

**Dr. Bernhard Wolfslehner** emphasized **the need for consistency in the forest policy landscape**. In order to **connect policies to realities**, a high level of consistency is required. At the same time, the focus was put on the fact that **forests are the most important natural resources** Europe has. There is a lot of potential to shape future developments proactively with this resource.

**Ms. Marion continued the panel discussion** by laying out the state of play of the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy. One key action that is already on its way, concerns the support for forestry in the national CAP plans that the European Commission is currently discussing with the Member States. The European Commission is putting together a technical guidance document on **the development of ecosystem service payment schemes. In the context of the Forest Strategy, legislative actions are also being undertaken**, including the preparation of the **Nature Restoration Law** (which should come out in the second semester of 2022) and the revisions of RED, LULUCF, and the Deforestation Regulation. Crucially, **a new Forest Monitoring and Strategic Planning Framework Law** is also in the works, with an **open public consultation** underway.

**Ms. Woodhouse** shared some data from the Global Tree Assessment, stressing the much lower species diversity in Europe compared to other regions that have to be considered while undertaking SFM interventions. Furthermore, **only 6% of EU forests are situated in protected areas, but about 96% of forests have a dedicated management plan** in place and many forests are publicly owned. Continuing, it was mentioned that **IUCN looks forward to the Nature Restoration Law coming out. All restoration pledges must be upheld to enhance biodiversity conservation** while restoring degraded ecosystems.

Speaking on the complex relationship between the Forest Europe process, individual countries, and the EU, Dr. Wolfslehner noted that **all Member States and the EU itself are signatories to Forest Europe**. A lot of progress has been made in the last 30 years, and **the procedural successes of this informal policy forum**, such as finding common definitions, **are not to be underestimated** either. **Double obligations under EU policies and Forest Europe must be avoided**. Moving on, Dr. Wolfslehner underlined that **SFM is a well-established concept that provides stability in the political discourse** but is also dynamic enough to adapt to rapid changes, which is needed more than ever.

Ending the panel discussion, **Dr. Mayer** commented that in all forest-related policies, people should always be considered, as their **livelihoods are directly impacted by such measures**. **Some policies have the tendency to look at the issue at hand as a closed system; however, a holistic approach must be adopted for the forestry sector** because of the many interlinkages that exist with other sectors. Lastly, possible new forms of governance were addressed by Dr. Mayer: **an innovative approach, new platforms of exchange, and new forms of governance are needed** to maximise synergies and avoid silo thinking. In any case, **existing knowledge created by Forest Europe must not be duplicated**.

## Reactions

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*Joan Calabuig Rull, Rapporteur for the Opinion on the “EU Forest Strategy for 2030”, CoR*

**“Due to 40% of forests belonging to public authorities, regions and cities have a lot of say in the management of these forests, since they will be the ones implementing the regulations adopted at the EU and national level.”**

Mr. Calabuig Rull started by explaining that because 40% of forests belong to public authorities, **regions, and cities will be crucial in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy**. In his role as **Rapporteur for the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the “EU Forest Strategy for 2030”**, Mr. Calabuig Rull is trying to bring together a consensus around this topic. However, echoing Dr. Winkel’s comments that **political polarization can be observed around the EU Forest Strategy**, this has turned out not to be a straightforward task. An important element to consider is the interests of the communities that are managing forests on the ground. Continuing, the diversity of forests in the EU was highlighted to stress that **a single European vision will not be sufficient to reach SFM**. In addition to this, **other issues must be inserted into the debate on SFM**, including biodiversity and the creation of quality jobs in rural areas. “It is necessary to have these **three elements: environmental, economic and social**”. To this end, the funds for SFM must be increased across all policies, including the CAP.

*Simo Tiainen, Rapporteur for the Opinion on the “New EU Forest Strategy for 2030”, EESC*

**“Forests are so diverse in different parts of Europe that it is important that the governance decisions are made at the right level, in accordance with competences and the principle of subsidiarity.”**

Mr. Simo Tiainen pointed out that the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) started working on its Opinion on the “EU Forest Strategy for 2030” in September 2021. In this Opinion, it is acknowledged that **forests play a multifaceted role through their significant environmental, social and economic potential**. However, the European Commission could have addressed the social and economic pillars more expansively in its proposal by balancing them better with environmental aspects. This is especially relevant as **60% of EU forests are privately owned** and often used primarily for economic activities. Moving along, other speakers’ argument that a **“one size fits all” approach is not appropriate** was reiterated; it

was concluded that **the competences of each governance level must be respected**, following the principle of subsidiarity. The EESC's Opinion stressed **the need for coherence and stability in the regulatory framework**. Additionally, **the EESC is asking the European Commission to provide a comprehensive impact assessment regarding the Forest Strategy**. A final point of the Opinion is that a level playing field among EU companies should be promoted and that the global implementation of international agreements contributing to SFM must be enhanced.

*Tomáš Krejzar, Director, Department of Forest Policy and Economics, Ministry of Agriculture, Czech Republic*

**“We look positively into the future and want to cooperate with the European Commission in implementing the Forest Strategy.”**

**Mr. Tomáš Krejzar** reiterated that the Council was dissatisfied with the lack of inclusion of Member States' contributions in the creation of the EU Forest Strategy, contrary to prior initiatives. Even though the agenda of the **upcoming Czech Council Presidency** is not closely linked to the Forest Strategy, **they hope to contribute to the Strategy's implementation by working closely with the European Commission and by organising informal events**. In this context, Mr. Krejzar announced that **a workshop** will be held from 14 to 16 September 2022 in the Czech Republic that will focus on forest observation, reporting and data collection. Moving on, he suggested that the European Commission may have plans to create a unique, unified platform for discussing forest-related issues with all kinds of stakeholders. However, their preference is to **organise a platform based on the existing Standing Forestry Committee established by the decision of the Council**. This excellent tool can be adjusted to respond to current demands. Tackling all forest-related legislative proposals and initiatives will require different Council formations, bodies and working groups to act in concert. **Coordination at both the EU and national level are key**.

## Q&A Session

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In the Q&A session, **Ms. Marion** responded that **the European Commission has no intention to create any additional EU bodies that would compete with existing bodies**. Rather, the European Commission wants to implement the Forest Strategy with a spirit of cooperation,



using existing knowledge and expertise from groups that are already effective. The idea behind proposing new types of governance is for instance to make the Standing Forestry Committee more inclusive, without changing its fundamental purpose as a platform for Member State representatives to respond to forestry-related initiatives from the European Commission. **The implementation of the EU Forest Strategy should have a timeframe that allows it to have more consultations and exchanges with relevant stakeholders.** Answering a final question, **Mr. Tiainen** commented that the strategy towards publicly-owned forests should be different than the one towards privately-owned forests.

## Closing Remarks

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*MEP Simone Schmiedtbauer*

**“Ensuring coherence and synergies between policies while building trust and using knowledge and expertise of European forest owners and managers is so important.”**

**MEP Simone Schmiedtbauer** reflected on the discussion by first **stressing the importance of a horizontal approach**, focusing on a holistic perspective instead of on a specific policy proposal. The reason for this is that **an SFM approach is relevant for many ongoing EU policies**. Echoing arguments from the keynote speech and from the panel discussion, she put forward that **it is essential to keep the big picture in mind when considering forest management in policies**. In addition, ensuring coherence and synergies between policies while building trust by using the knowledge and expertise of European forest owners and managers is crucial. The event has also included **the position of Member States, regions and economic and social parties**. Questions and concerns expressed by these actors must be taken into account by the European Commission in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy. Even more so when considering that their opinions are often in line with those of forest owners and managers. It was also shown that **SFM must primarily build on existing work**, for instance, the ongoing work of Forest Europe. **All inputs from this event will feed the European Parliament’s continuing work on framing its position on the EU Forest Strategy and other forest-related policies** such as RED III, LULUCF, or the Regulation on halting Deforestation.