

## 1 Introduction

The Council Resolution on a forestry strategy for the European Union was adopted in 1998. It established a framework for forest-related actions in support of sustainable forest management, based on the co-ordination of the forest policies of the Member States and Community policies and initiatives relevant to forests and forestry.

The Strategy emphasises the sustainable forest management (SFM) as defined by the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe and the multifunctional role of forests as overall principles for action. It states that forest policy lies in the competence of the Member States, but that the EU can contribute to the implementation of SFM through common policies, based on the principle of subsidiarity and the concept of shared responsibility. It also emphasises the implementation of international commitments, principles and recommendations through national or sub-national forest programmes or equivalent instruments, and active participation in all forest-related international processes, and stresses the need to improve co-ordination, communication and co-operation in all policy areas of relevance to the forest sector.

Implementation of the forestry strategy was reported by the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament in 2005. The consequent Council Conclusions invited the Commission, in close co-operation with the Member States and in consultation with stakeholders, to elaborate a proposal for an Action Plan. The Council recognised the need for greater coherence of forest-related policies:

*...the EU Forestry Strategy needs to be updated as a basis for the EU Forest Action Plan to take a proactive approach allowing the forest sector to enhance its competitiveness and economic viability, and to address the growing needs and expectations of society and the challenges of globalisation.*

As a response to the Council request, the EU Forest Action Plan (EU FAP) was put forward and adopted in 2006. It is based on the principles and elements identified in the Forestry Strategy for the EU. The Leading Actors responsible for implementing the plan in 2007-2011 are the Commission and the Member States.

The EU FAP covers actions concerning forest resources and their related ecology, economy and social aspects. It provides a framework for the implementation of forest-related actions at Community and Member State level, and serves as an instrument of co-ordination between different Community actions as well as between Community actions and forest policies of the Member States. The overall aim is to support and enhance sustainable forest management and multifunctional role of forests.

The EU FAP is to be evaluated at mid-term (2009) and after the five-year running period (2012). The aim of the mid-term evaluation of the EU FAP is to:

*...analyse if the implementation is on track for meeting the objectives of the Action Plan, whether these objectives have been met so far, if the Action Plan has led to any side effects and whether the instruments used are relevant, effective and*

*efficient. This analysis should also be carried out in the light of key developments for the forest sectors in the Member States, and at European and international levels.*

This report presents the results of the mid-term evaluation carried out by an external evaluation team during December 2008 – September 2009. Evaluation has been guided by a Steering Group consisting of representatives of the Commission i.e. the DGs involved in implementation of the EU FAP and lead by the DG Agriculture and Rural Development Evaluation unit.

The report presents results of the background studies, implementation inventory of the EU FAP and the evaluation of the Action Plan. In the beginning of the report a short introduction is given to the structure of the forest sector and the policy landscape in which the EU Forest Action Plan operates (Chapter 2). Forests have different functions in different parts of the EU. The role and character of the forest-based sector in the EU Member States varies considerably. The forest policy in the EU is largely a matter of national competence, and the institutional and political framework of the forestry policy is complex with several institutional players dealing with forest-related policies at European and international levels as well as in the EU Member States. The EU Forestry Strategy and the EU Forest Action Plan identify, as one of the substantial elements, that the international commitments, principles and recommendations should be implemented through national and sub-national forest programmes or appropriate instruments developed by the Member States. The Chapter 2 includes a short description of the relationship between the EU FAP and the national forest policies and national forest programmes as this was demonstrated by the Member States in the mid-term evaluation survey.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used, as well as the data and information collected in the exercise. Chapter 4 presents the implementation of the EU FAP by describing progress in the 18 Key Actions defined in the EU FAP Work Programme 2007-2011. Chapter 5 is constructed according to the six evaluation themes and 11 evaluation questions of the mid-term evaluation. Each evaluation question includes analysis of the specific Key Action(s) and the effectiveness and efficiency of activities carried out so far. Evaluation questions include conclusions on effects achieved and effects expected towards the EU FAP objectives. Furthermore the extent to which the EU FAP is consistent with stakeholder requirements, Member State needs, global priorities, and Community policies is assessed. Chapter 6 concludes the analysis of the evaluation themes and recommendations for the EU FAP.