

6 Conclusions and recommendations

Aim and background of the EU Forest Action Plan

The aims of the mid-term evaluation of the 2007-2011 EU Forest Action Plan (EU FAP) are: to judge 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.

The implementation of the EU FAP has started in accordance with the work programme defined for the Action Plan which considering that the Action Plan has no less than 18 Key Actions and 55 Activities is a remarkable achievement. The activities have been carried out to a large extent as planned in the multiannual Work Programme 2007-2011, and in this respect, the Action Plan has been implemented efficiently. The prioritisations made in the work programme have been followed: in other words, the implementation in 2007-2008 has focused on Objective 1 (long-term competitiveness), Objective 2 (enhancing and protecting the environment) and Objective 4 (co-ordination, coherence and communication). Objective 3 (contribution to quality of life) implementation at the EU level is underway for the second part of the implementation period 2009-2011.

The intensive preparation of the EU FAP in 2005-2006, in close cooperation between the Commission and the Member States and with consultation of the stakeholders, has provided a good basis for the start-up of the EU FAP. It has also raised expectations for the EU FAP. The dialogue and consultation approach has been continued from 2007 onwards but, at the mid-term, it is difficult to show concrete examples of effects that the EU FAP has had on Community actions or on the forest policies in the Member States.

Findings of the mid-term evaluation study

The effects of the EU FAP on its specific goals of contributing to long-term competitiveness, enhancing and protecting the environment, and contributing to quality of life cannot be expected to show up after only two years of implementation. However, based on the results of the surveys of this evaluation, the EU FAP is on track. In other words, there is real progress with regard to more co-ordination across different policy areas, more coherent action within the Commission, more implementation in the Member States, and more awareness of the different situations and questions that relate to forests and forest-sector development in different parts of the EU. These steps forward are not major changes in practices, but the EU FAP does definitely contribute to a more co-ordinated approach for forest-related actions in the EU.

In the following analysis the key findings concerning the six evaluation themes of the EU FAP mid-term evaluation are summarised. In the previous chapter the analysis of the evaluation themes were concluded with recommendations made separately for each of the 11 evaluation questions grouped under the Evaluation Themes. Based on the

analysis and the recommendations specific to the Key Actions, this chapter presents a number of policy recommendations for each of the evaluation themes, as well as for the EU FAP as a whole for the remaining implementation period 2009-2011. For more details on each of the evaluation themes, see Chapter 5.

Evaluation Theme 1: improving long-term competitiveness

The EU FAP activities contributing to the long-term competitiveness of the forest sector have been carried out to a large extent according to the Work Programme and, in this respect, the implementation of the work programme is efficient. The action concerning the forest owner co-operation and enhancement of education and training in forestry (Key Action 5) is to be started in 2009. The Standing Forestry Committee (SFC) ad hoc Working Groups as well as the studies produced in the EU FAP have been an effective and efficient way to mobilise expertise to support the EU FAP implementation. It remains for the Member States, the Commission as well as other stakeholders to put the outcomes from the discussions into practice.

At the stage of the mid-term evaluation, showing the contribution of the EU FAP to the long-term competitiveness of the sector is difficult. An indirect impact on the competitiveness can be expected, e.g. due to the knowledge gained by the studies and due to better definition of priorities and increased allocation of the 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7) resources for the forest-sector research in the EU, and due to the support provided under the rural development policy. Furthermore, a number of Member States indicate that the emphasis given in the EU FAP to, for example: bioenergy, non-wood goods and services, and research allocations, have an effect on the national agendas. Thus, there would be follow-up and activities in the Member States, but these activities cannot yet be shown after only two years of the EU FAP implementation.

There are no follow-up or monitoring mechanisms envisaged in the EU FAP multiannual work programme 2007-2011. Nor are there financial resources earmarked for the EU FAP implementation. The existing resources, rural development and regional policy funding, are to be utilised for financing the activities in support of the EU FAP. The Member States indicate that both EU and national funds are being utilised to enhance the competitiveness of the forest sector. Follow-up of activities already carried out in the EU FAP Objective 1 would be an additional measure to the activities defined in the EU FAP Work Programme, but follow-up would be needed to make the progress towards enhancing the competitiveness visible as well as to share good practices between the Member States, EU institutions and stakeholders.

The EU FAP reaches the key policy-makers and stakeholders to the extent that these are involved in the SFC and the Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork (AGFC) as well as the Inter-Services' Group (ISG) on Forestry within the Commission. The working mode of the SFC ad hoc Working Groups has strengthened dialogue, and the participatory approach can be expected to contribute to a better take-off for the EU FAP outputs. At the stage of the mid-term evaluation, it is difficult to show this influence as specific actions triggered by the EU FAP.

Key actions under Theme 1 address the economic dimension of sustainable forest management and aim at fostering the competitiveness of the sector; Economic viability is a key pillar of sustainable forest management and of crucial importance for maintaining forests and their multiple benefits to society. Improving the long-term competitiveness of the forest sector is therefore a main goal at EU level. Dissemination of the EU FAP outputs (e.g. studies, Working Group reports and recommendations, SFC opinions) to a wider group of actors is not comprehensive, but the good and well-timed outputs are available to those that need them and know where to search for them. To make the leverage of the EU FAP more efficient and effective would require wider dissemination to groups outside the organisations implementing the EU FAP, and the EU FAP outputs should in any case be disseminated to the key policy-makers and stakeholders in parallel sectors e.g. energy, environment and agriculture.

Key recommendations Theme 1:

- There should be a follow-up of the activities already carried out in the EU FAP Objective 1 during 2007-2009 making visible how the EU FAP outputs contribute to the EU and national implementation.
- In order to make the EU FAP more known, both within the forest sector and among the key policy-makers and stakeholders in parallel sectors, the awareness of the EU FAP and its outputs should be improved. For example, constant presentations on the FAP and FAP outcomes at seminars, workshops or conferences could provide a means to improve the leverage from the EU FAP to both the practitioners and to the high political level.

Evaluation Theme 2: enhancing and protecting the environment

Activities enhancing and protecting the environment include information sharing in relation to international commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol and the contribution to biodiversity goals as well as development of the forest monitoring in the EU. Activities have been carried out in accordance with the EU FAP work programme.

So far the EU FAP has provided a platform for information sharing and dialogue to reach the SFC representatives of the Member States and the AGFC representatives of the stakeholders, but it is not directly a part of the EU decision-making processes. The information sharing can be expected to have an indirect impact on the positive environmental and health effects of forests required by global and international arrangements. This can be done by e.g.: increased awareness of different viewpoints regarding the forest-sector issues; increased understanding of different demands on forests; better understanding of the EU obligations and their impact by sharing experiences between the Member States on implementation of these obligations at the national level. Without better coverage of information on activities carried out in the Member States, the EU FAP does not effectively support the EU contribution to the forest-related international processes, including reporting of the EU compliance with the international commitments.

The issue of climate change has gained importance in policy discussions since the adoption of the EU FAP Key Actions and activities in 2006. This is visible in the implementation of the EU FAP as discussions carried out in 2007-2008 and as establishment of the SFC ad hoc Working Group on Climate Change and Forestry in 2008/2009. Although the work is just starting in 2009, the ad hoc Working Group is seen an effective way towards dialogue and consensus-building among different stakeholder groups. Currently the work programme of the SFC does not make explicitly the linkage between the EU FAP and discussions in the Council, where the forest related topics are handled in the Working Party on Forestry, but also in several other working parties and expert groups (e.g. relating to climate change, biodiversity, energy, development). Effectiveness of the EU FAP with regard to enhancing and protecting the environment could be improved, with a stronger link from the EU FAP to deliberations at EU and national levels.

Forest monitoring is an integral part of enhancing and protecting the environment. A fully operational European forest monitoring system is highly desired by various information providers and users and it is regarded as essential for effective and efficient policy-making at EU level. Since the Forest Focus Regulation expired in 2006, there have been no financial means for ensuring sustained maintenance of forest monitoring given that the LIFE+ financial instrument operates on a project basis. Although the European Forest Data Centre, EFDAC, and the European Forest Fires Information System, EFFIS, developed further during the EU FAP, are considered as good tools, the impact of the EU FAP on elaboration of a European forest monitoring system is modest. The EU FAP has had an indirect effect on the deliberations and policy formulation on forest monitoring and forest protection in the EU. The EU FAP has provided a platform to discuss the issue among the Member States, but the deliberations did not lead to a common position on how to proceed. The Commission White Paper on Adapting to Climate Change: Towards a European Framework for Action (COM (2009) 147) proposes to open a debate at the EU level on forest protection and forest information systems, including the issues such as monitoring, climate factors, biodiversity and the protective functions of EU forests. The EU FAP can support this process.

Key recommendations Theme 2:

- Stronger link from the EU FAP to the deliberations at EU and national levels should be aimed at, e.g. by linking the National Forest Programmes (NFPs) and the EU FAP more closely together. Sharing of information on implementation in the Member States should be improved by a more structured reporting to the SFC.
- Although the EU FAP is not directly linked with the EU decision-making, it can promote the work already done towards a European forest monitoring system, and it can utilise the SFC and AGFC to debate on forest protection and forest information. Further means to contribute to the debate are e.g. studies and a network of organisations. Furthermore, the Commission and the Member States should address the long-term financing of a European forest monitoring system.

Evaluation Theme 3: contribution to quality of life

The importance of the EU FAP Objective 3 Contribution to Quality of Life is recognised in the feedback collected by the mid-term evaluation surveys. Nevertheless very few activities were planned for the first implementation period 2007-2009, and it is too early to assess whether and how the EU FAP has had an effect on the goal of contributing to preserving and improving the social and cultural dimensions of forests.

In the mid-term evaluation, the Member States report national activities and programmes with the aims of: enforcing environmental education; enhancing the protective functions of forests; the potential of urban/peri-urban forests. These activities are also reflected in the rural development programmes of the Member States, which provide a link with the EU FAP Objective 3. The UNECE/FAO Forest Communicators' Network (FCN) is active in forest pedagogics and in forest communication in Europe, and it has defined support for the EU FAP goals as one of its tasks – nevertheless, the role and functions of the FCN is not defined in the EU FAP work programme.

The fact that the EU FAP Objective 3 activities are starting at EU level in 2009, gives Member States and the Commission the possibility to check the focus of the Objective 3, the activities to be carried out in 2009-2011, and also the role that the Forest Communicators' Network could play in the implementation of the EU FAP. Many activities related to the EU FAP Objective 3 in the Member States are carried out at sub-national level and sharing of information on how each country has mobilised specific funding instruments (e.g. rural development programmes EAFRD, regional development programmes ERDF and the education and training programmes) could also be a valuable and constructive output to increase effectiveness of the EU FAP in contributing to quality of life. Such an exchange of information could be based on the analysis of forestry measures in the Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013 that the Commission has elaborated in 2008.

Key recommendations Theme 3:

- In order to emphasise the three sustainability dimensions and the multifunctional role of forests it is important to implement also the EU FAP Objective 3 Key Actions, and produce concrete outputs illustrating how forests contribute to quality of life. SFC should discuss how the Objective 3 will be implemented and, if needed, prioritise its Key Actions for the remaining implementation period 2009-2011.
- An information exchange could be organised within the SFC regarding the specific funding instruments which the Member States have mobilised to support the EU FAP in general and the Objective 3 in particular.

Evaluation Theme 4: Improving forest sector co-ordination, coherence and communication

The EU FAP has been efficient in organising and structuring the work of the SFC, e.g. by proposing themes and topics in a multi-annual work programme, a clear timetable and regular meetings in annual work programme, calling in expertise by forming

working groups and contributing to policy formulation by opinions. The effect on policy formulation is indirect. The SFC opinions are not available publicly and it is not explicitly defined in the EU FAP the structures and mechanisms how the SFC opinions are supposed to contribute to national policy deliberations or to the initiatives and actions in the Commission. However, based on the feedback collected in the mid-term evaluation, it can be expected that there is an impact on policy processes both at EU and national levels. The SFC has been – although to a limited extent – beneficial for the co-ordination and communication between Community actions and the forest policies of the Member States. Showing concrete actions which are triggered in the Member States or as Community actions would require more than the two years of EU FAP implementation at the stage of the mid-term evaluation.

A number of countries indicate that they have utilised the EU FAP in developing their NFPs – e.g. to check the national agenda and priorities. In order to improve effectiveness, it would be important to make the connection between the NFPs and the EU FAP more visible, and share experience of NFP (or equivalent) between the Member States. Stakeholders emphasise the need for information sharing between the Member States and the stakeholders – e.g. on participatory processes in NFPs in the EU. For practical reasons, by 2009 joint meetings of the members of the SFC and AGFC and with the AC-FBI have not been arranged although this activity was planned in the EU FAP work programme. However, the Chairman of the AGFC has regularly participated in the SFC meetings.

The EU FAP has been efficient and effective in improving the mutual information sharing between Commission services on forestry issues thus contributing to better co-ordination within the Commission as well as improving the coherence between different Community actions. Coordination through the EU FAP (e.g. the SFC Work Programme providing an agenda) has also ensured structured information sharing to the SFC and AGFC. However, the need for a coherent and proactive approach to the forest sector remains: many forest sector related initiatives are prepared in parallel processes in several policy areas. In addition to the Inter-Services' Group on Forestry, there is also an Inter-Services' Group on International Forestry in the Commission. The Inter-Services' Group on International Forestry is not involved in the implementation of the EU FAP. The international processes, e.g. in relation to the climate change have recently increased the need for improved co-ordination and coherence as well as the need to review the co-ordination of the forest-related issues within the Commission.

Key recommendations Theme 4:

- The following measures are proposed for consideration for the remaining EU FAP period in 2009-2011 with regard to the operation of the SFC:
 - continuing with the annual work programmes of the SFC, the SFC opinions, the SFC ad hoc working groups and the studies conducted on the EU FAP issues
 - more active involvement of the Member States in the process of establishing the annual work programmes of the SFC
 - more structured reporting of Member State activities to SFC
 - means for following up and making visible how the EU FAP outputs are utilised in the EU institutions and in the Member States

- joint meetings between SFC, AC-FBI and AGFC on an ad hoc basis addressing emerging key issues where appropriate
- In order to support a broader awareness of the SFC opinions, the Commission should make the SFC opinions publicly available at the Commission forestry web-site.
- The Commission should review the tasks of the two forest-related ISGs in order to investigate how the inter-services' co-ordination could still be improved for implementation of the EU FAP.

Evaluation Theme 5: Dissemination of best practices and improving the visibility of the sector

Activities in relation to the dissemination of best practices and improving the visibility of the forest sector have been carried out to a large extent as planned in the EU FAP work programme. The activity concerning the open method of co-ordination for NFPs is planned for the second period of implementation.

Use of wood and other forest products from sustainably managed forests has been encouraged in the EU FAP – e.g. by exchange of experience between the Member States. The SFC ad hoc Working Group on Public Procurement (PP) for wood and wood based-products has started its work in 2009, at a point when several Member States are planning or preparing new or revising existing PP schemes for wood. The timing gives a good basis for efficient and effective dissemination of best practices. The goal of EU FAP encouraging use of wood could be hampered by the fact that there are several sets of sustainability criteria being defined in parallel policy areas in the EU. These different sets of sustainability criteria are being defined in different policy areas, for example in energy and public procurement, and they affect the use of forest products (biomass, wood, cork, wood-based products, paper, etc.) and sustainable forest management. Sustainability criteria of forest products should be streamlined in order to avoid different requirements for management practices depending of the final use.

Although the EU FAP defines as its goal to strengthen the EU profile in international forest-related processes, the international forestry issues are not directly within the scope of the EU FAP – e.g. the preparations for the UNFCCC Conference Of Parties (COP) meeting in Copenhagen in 2009 take place in the Member States and in the EU institutions. The feedback in the mid-term evaluation shows that there are expectations for a more co-ordinated approach and presentation of the EU forest sector in the climate change negotiations. The EU FAP has been an efficient way to share information and to reach the representatives of the SFC, the AGFC and the ISG on forestry, but the effect on the international forest-related processes is indirect. Increasing globalisation and the global challenges (e.g. climate change) would require better integration of the international forest-related processes and initiatives into the EU FAP.

Measures to improve availability of forestry information have been taken (e.g. creation of the European Forest Information and Communication Platform establishing an EU forestry web-site, a public perception study). But in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the EU FAP it would be crucial to make the EU FAP better known to a

wider group of forest sector stakeholders and other sectors e.g. energy, environment and agriculture. At the moment the added value at an EU level remains to a large extent unattained: there are several parallel forest sector information and communication activities and events (such as regular forest days, forest weeks, stakeholder activities and campaigns in favour of forests and Sustainable Forest Management), but they are not linked to the EU FAP and the goals defined at the level of the EU. There are no specific financial resources earmarked at the Commission for the EU FAP communication and dissemination of the results. Without better synergy of already existing networks and efforts to improve forest communication in Europe (e.g. the national measures and the United Nations Economic Commission to Europe (UNECE)/Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Forest Communicators' Network), resources are used for individual parallel activities, but the fact that there is also an EU Forest Action Plan remains unknown to the public. Better utilisation of the existing channels for dissemination of the EU FAP outputs, in particular to decision-makers on all levels but also to the relevant key stakeholders and the general public, would also contribute to better launch of activities at the national, regional and local levels.

Key recommendations Theme 5:

- The SFC should discuss the challenge of the different sets of sustainability criteria that are being defined in different policy areas (i.e. energy, public procurement, etc.) and sustainable forest management practices.
- Better integration of international and EU forestry issues is needed. The SFC should trigger and coordinate the discussion of the Member States about what will happen after the EU FAP 2011, including the validity of the EU Forestry Strategy (Council Resolution of 15 December 1998) in relation to the global challenges and related ongoing processes.
- Communication and information of the EU FAP should be improved, e.g.:
 - The Commission should consider what means there are for making the EU FAP more known and more visible in the EU communication;
 - The Member States should consider how the already ongoing activities, information and communication measures at the national and sub-national level could link up with the EU FAP;
 - The Member States and the Commission should define how the Forest Communicators' Network could be better utilised in the EU FAP;
 - The Commission and the SFC in consultation with the AGFC should discuss how the forthcoming events in 2009-2011 (e.g. the International Year of Forests 2011) could be utilised to make the EU action for sustainable forest management more visible, and raise the public awareness on the benefits of forests and sustainable forest management.

Evaluation theme 6: relevance of the EU FAP

The need defined by the Council “*to strengthen coherence between forest-related EU policies and initiatives, and to enhance co-ordination within the Commission and between the Commission and the Member States*” has not changed substantially during the first two years of the EU FAP implementation. The current specific objectives, Key Actions and activities are relevant for the remaining implementation period 2009-2011,

and the mid-term evaluation gives the Member States and the Commission an opportunity to recheck the focus for the remaining years as appropriate.

The definition of the plan according to the three sustainability dimensions as EU FAP Objectives 1-3 is very relevant and provides a balanced approach to SFM. The main objectives of the FAP are also well reflected in the EU rural development policy, which is the main instrument at Community level for implementing the EU Forestry Strategy and Action Plan. The mid-term evaluation feedback shows that there can be an indirect effect from the EU FAP contributing to the national prioritisations and agenda setting. In this respect it is important that also the EU FAP Objective 3 is implemented during 2009-2011. At the national level, the NFPs cover the three sustainability dimensions with several activities, but at the moment the NFPs and measures do not efficiently connect with the EU FAP.

The EU FAP Key Actions and activities are relevant. The EU FAP and its outputs have reached the key policy-makers and the stakeholders who are directly involved in the implementation of the EU FAP, but other target groups (e.g. parallel sectors, wider groups of stakeholders) have not been reached. This hampers the relevance of the EU FAP to national and to EU level policy formulation and deliberations. Increasing the visibility of the EU FAP and its products – and later on its results – would improve the relevance of the EU FAP. Better awareness of the EU FAP also at the sub-national level would enhance the EU added value. In this respect the information and communication measures together with monitoring and follow-up of the EU FAP activities, are important to improve the relevance.

The EU FAP is based on the principle of subsidiarity and the concept of shared responsibility. Forest policy is the competence of the Member States, but the EU can contribute to the implementation of sustainable forest management through common actions. The organisational set-up of the EU FAP is adequate for the remaining implementation period 2009-2011, but the means for improving the utilisation of the existing structures (the SFC, the AGFC and the Inter-services' Groups within the Commission) should be discussed, and the link between the EU FAP and the policy formulations and decision-making at the EU level and at the national levels should be further strengthened. At the same time, it would be equally important to start discussions on the follow-up of the EU FAP after 2011, including the key elements, measures, potential financial instruments and organisational set-up of the action after EU FAP.

Key recommendations Theme 6:

- means for improving the utilisation of the existing structures (the SFC, the AGFC and the Inter-services' Groups within the Commission) should be discussed, and the link between the EU FAP and the policy formulations and decision-making at the EU level and at the national levels should be further strengthened. At the same time, it would be important to start discussions on the follow-up of the EU FAP after 2011, including the key elements, measures, potential financial instruments and organisational set-up of the action after EU FAP.
- Information and communication need to be strengthened to improve the leverage of the EU FAP.

Key recommendations for the EU FAP as a whole:

The main recommendations of the mid-term evaluation of the EU FAP are the following:

- I. In order to show the effect of the activities already carried out in the EU FAP and the contribution that the EU FAP makes to long-term competitiveness of the forest sector, to enhancing and protecting the environment and to quality of life, it is important to arrange **follow-up and monitoring of the activities** to show how the EU FAP outputs are realised as measures by the EU institutions, by the Member States and by other stakeholders. The follow-up could be linked to already existing events, such as EU forest directors/nature directors meetings, working parties or expert group meetings, but also stakeholder activities, sub-national activities (territorial cooperation networks and activities) or e.g. research networks (COST or other actions and networks). This way the EU FAP outputs (e.g. forestry web-site studies, reports, recommendations, SFC opinions) could be **widely communicated and disseminated** to key policy-makers and stakeholders outside the groups directly involved in implementation of the EU FAP.
- II. A **stronger link between the EU FAP and the NFPs (or equivalent)** in the Member States should be sought. With better coverage of information on activities carried out in the Member States, the EU FAP could more effectively support the EU contribution to the forest-related international processes, including reporting of the EU compliance with the international commitments. The SFC should take an active role in initiating discussions on the development of concrete options for a coherent and integrated approach to sustainable forest management, including forest protection and forest information.
- III. **Regional approaches and collaborative partnerships (science-policy-practice)** in dealing with regional challenges of forest sector competitiveness, enhancement and protection of forests and contribution of forests to the quality of life should be encouraged to test good practices, foster innovation and ensure subsidiarity. Furthermore, an information exchange could be organised within the SFC regarding the specific funding instruments which the Member States have mobilised to support the EU FAP.
- IV. Discussion about the **follow-up of the EU FAP after 2011** – and the **EU Forestry Strategy** – should be started within the EU FAP framework (i.e. the SFC, the AGFC and the ISGs). Based on the feedback collected in the mid-term evaluation the following aspects are raised for consideration in the post-2011 discussions:
 - more holistic approach to forest sector issues, making it more interrelated with parallel sectors and with environmental, economic and social policies;
 - integration of the international forestry issues into the EU forestry action;
 - higher profile of the EU in international forest-related processes;

- update of the EU Forestry Strategy considering emerging issues and new challenges;
- strengthening the science-policy-practice triangle by better coordination of scientific work and utilisation of financial resources (FP7, COST, national);
- preparation of post-2013 financial instruments.

It is important that the outcome of the EU FAP mid-term evaluation is discussed in an open dialogue within the Commission, in the SFC, the Council Working Party on Forestry and in the Member States and with stakeholders in the AGFC and AC-FBI.

In order to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the EU FAP, the evaluation proposes to arrange with the Member States (SFC), the Commission (both ISGs), the AGFC and the AC-FBI discussions about the need for action with regard to the EU FAP remaining implementation period as well as the options for post-2011. This could also be an opportunity to reflect on the follow-up of the Action Plan and the update of the EU Forestry Strategy building on the work already carried out in the EU FAP approach and, as appropriate to improve the concept of the EU Forest Action Plan for the future.