

Report of the

**Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the EU Forest
Action Plan**

Service Contract No. 30-CE-0227729/00-59

Synthetic Summary

November 2009

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Aim of the mid-term evaluation 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.

Main results and recommendations from the mid-term evaluation

The implementation of the EU FAP has started in accordance with the Work Programme 2007-2011, and the Action Plan has been implemented efficiently.

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 mid-term evaluation surveys, the EU FAP is on track, and 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 contribute to a more co-ordinated approach for forest-related actions in the EU.

Evaluation Theme 1: improving long-term competitiveness

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. Furthermore, 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. 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.

There are no financial resources earmarked for the EU FAP implementation, but the Member States indicate that both EU and national funds are being utilised to enhance the competitiveness of the forest sector.

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. 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.

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.

So far the EU FAP has provided a platform 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 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 and this is visible in the implementation of the EU FAP. The SFC ad hoc Working Group on Climate Change and Forestry started its work in 2009, and it 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. 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. 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. 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, but the impact of the EU FAP on elaboration of a European forest monitoring system is modest. 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. 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. 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. Implementation of the activities starts at EU level in 2009.

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. Many activities related to the EU FAP Objective 3 in the Member States are carried out at sub-national level with funding of e.g. rural development programmes EAFRD, regional development programmes ERDF and the education and training programmes.

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. The effect on policy formulation is indirect. Based on the feedback collected in the mid-term evaluation, 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 national forest programmes (NFP) – 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 at the EU level between the Member States and the stakeholders.

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 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. 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

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, for example in energy and public procurement. 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. 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 include e.g. creation of the European Forest Information and Communication Platform, establishing an EU forestry

web-site, and a public perception study. 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. 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 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 should be discussed. At the same time, it would be equally important to start discussions on the follow-up of the EU FAP after 2011.

Key recommendations Theme 6:

- Means for improving the utilisation of the existing structures (the SFC, the AGFC and the ISGs 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 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.