WORKING GROUP
“FOREST FIRE PREVENTION”
PROPOSALS TO BE PRESENTED TO THE EC
(Fifth draft)*

* After the Zaragoza meeting, 28 September 2004, and Ispra meeting, 9 November 2004, discussions and the latter comments of the WG members. The debates in the Conference on Forest Fires in the European Southern countries, Brussels, January 24-25, 2005, have also been considered.

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The protection of the environment in the EU cannot be effective without a policy for Forest Fire Prevention designed according to the distribution and intensity of the danger and developed in cooperation with the public and private stakeholders of the Forest Sector.
1. THE NEED OF A SPECIFIC REGULATION ON FOREST FIRE PREVENTION

- The best approach for many MS and professional bodies to keep a consistent forest fire prevention policy with a European scope is to establish a specific Regulation on Forest Fire Prevention (RFFP), coordinated also with specific articles in a new RDR (EAFRD).

The role of a specific Regulation on Forest Fire Prevention would be to play like a horizontal tool, taking into account the positive effects of an efficient prevention in all EU environmental initiatives.

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Nevertheless if the strategy of an “only instrument for environmental protection” prevails, it would be a must to establish adequate links between LIFE + and EAFRD with internal priorities in both Regulations in order to fix a true protection of the EU environment against fire.
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Protection of the woodland environment, including the NATURA 2000 areas, against fire cannot be achieved with the present wording of the LIFE + and EAFRD drafts (as known on December 2004).

Wording of either a “specific instrument” (RFFP) or an “only instrument” (LIFE + coordinated with EAFRD) must include horizontal measures on public information, awareness-raising and training on prevention techniques. It has to be considered the opportunity of giving priority to activities with a European scope (involving several countries) and a significant EU added value, like:

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- Maintenance and improvement of the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS), as a strategic tool for planification
- Actions on border areas, such as observation and monitoring networks with compatible communication systems (considering languages)
- Creation of material on awareness in several languages;
- Study of the use of fire by the rural population, and possible preventive actions. The study could comprise zones of several countries such as the Western Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal), the Alpine Region (France and Italy), the areas between Greece and the Balkans, etc;
- International training courses

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- Either RFFP or EAFRD (art. 45) must include detailed infrastructure measures (preventive silviculture, roads, lookouts, water reservoirs, etc), developed according to Forest Protection Plans with communitary economical support in the Risk zones.

- EAFRD must include also measures for burned areas restoration giving priority to the surfaces destroyed by large, intense fires, where the environmental impact is greatest.

- Coordination of these activities will require continued and increased collaboration between DG Agriculture and DG Environment.

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2. EFFIS, A TOOL TO DEFINE STRATEGIES AGAINST FIRE

- **Objectives.** EFFIS objectives should be defined with a European scope, making compatible its data with other forest monitoring tools in the EU like the National Forest Inventories.

- **Fire causes.** EFFIS has to discriminate fire causes according to a comprehensive list after the MS lists. The JRC has to prepare this list in cooperation with the MS.

- **Silvicultural condition.** A new generation of forest fuel and biomass maps has to be developed by the JRC in coordination with the MS.
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- Data collection.- A guide to data collection would be necessary to keep a harmonised information which would enable effective comparison between MS and build a set of historical data which can support future risk forecasting. The JRC should prepare this guide in cooperation with the MS.

- A priority activity of EFFIS should be setting up a danger prediction network covering all Europe plus the Mediterranean non EU countries, continuing the present services.

- Another priority is also the use of remote sensing for a quick appraise of large fires impacts, increasing the frequency of this service according to the technological evolution
3. RISK ZONES DEFINITION

Classification of risk zones, established according Regulation (EEC) No. 2158/92, should be revised and updated after fixing in EFFIS a set of common criteria. Fire frequency, percentage of forest loss and fire causes typology can be the criteria in order to develop such classification. However, flammability of species or fuel models can improve that classification and give further information to design preventive measures.

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- Zoning has to consider also relevant environmental and social aims like protected areas (Natura 2000 sites, Sites of Communitary Interest (SCI), Special Protected Areas (SPA), National Parks), forest/urban interfaces and border areas.

- Geographical identification of risk zones would have to consider the concept of forest areas defined according each MS methodology (e.g. “massif forestier” in France, etc)

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4. FOREST FIRE PROTECTION PLANS

- Although regional and national plans have been written after the Regulation (EEC) No 2158/92, they have to be revised or confirmed according to the recent national legislations and the future approach of EC support to prevention. A common set of indicators has to be designed inside EFFIS to follow their execution and to evaluate their results.

- Preparation of regional plans by the MS Administrations would have to consider the advice of the forest stakeholders (public and private forest owners)

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CONCLUSION

These proposals are all of them technically feasible and essential to achieve a basic level of protection against wildfire in the European forests.

The WG members hope that these proposals will be studied by the EC Services and considered by the EU Parliament in the preparation of the new financial instruments for the protection of the EU environment.

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