MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP
OF FOREST FIRE PREVENTION EXPERTS
Brussels, 14 May 2004

Chairperson:
Robert Flies, Head of the Unit-DG Environment B.3.

Agenda: Annex I
List of participants: Annex II

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION
The meeting of the informal working group of forest fire prevention experts took place in Brussels on 14 May 2004. Participants from thirteen EU Member States, five non-governmental organisations and different services of the Commission involved in the issue of forest fires attended the meeting.

The Chairperson welcomed the participants and thanked them for their decision of taking part to the working group in quality of experts.

1. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA
The provisional agenda was adopted, on the basis of a proposal sent out by the European Commission (see Annex II). No any modification has been proposed by the participants.

2. GENERAL INTRODUCTION
The Chairperson outlined the main agenda items, underlining the technical nature of this meeting. He explained the core task of the working group, represented by the elaboration of suggestions for the continuation of forest fire prevention activities to be put in place at EU level after the year 2006. He underlined the importance to collect such recommendations from the experts at a very early stage and to have them available during the second half of the year 2005.

The need to make a very efficient use of the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) established by the Forest Focus Regulation and to investigate about the potential EU added value for such actions and the necessity to concentrate efforts according to a new classification of risk zones and forest fire protections plans were recalled. It was also
clearly explained the role of the European Commission inside the working group, representing mainly a facilitator and secretariat.

Mr. Flies also recalled the fact that, according to the Commission Communication on the new financial perspectives for the period 2007-2013, in future the budgetary lines will be concentrated into few financial instruments; it is likely to expect only one big financial instrument for all the environmental actions. Therefore clarification of needs and concerns of the forest sector in relation to forest fire prevention is needed at a very early stage in order to be taken into due consideration.

3. INFORMATION GIVEN BY THE COMMISSION ON THE ONGOING FOREST FIRE ACTIVITIES

The different services of the Commission involved in the issue of forest fire gave the participants a brief presentation about their ongoing activities developed in this field.

- **DG Joint Research Center, Institute for Environmental Sustainability** (Mr. Jesus San-Miguel Ayanz) reported in detail the work developed by the Joint Research Center in relation with forest fires, notably the daily delivery of information related to fire risk forecasting system and the damage assessment system by remote sensing. He underlined the importance for the future development inside EFFIS of the “common core” database: it represents a unique database on forest fires in Europe but its data need to be verified, harmonized, validated and valorized. The importance of sound forest fire statistics as a powerful tool for forest policy decision makers was stressed.

- **DG Research, Unit 1.2** (Ms. Karen Fabbri) explained the relations with the Sixth Framework Programme for Research – that will expire at the end of 2006 – and the European Research Areas having a specific sub-area for forest fires whose next call for proposal is expected to be published next June. She recalled the main outcome of last forest fires research workshop, held in Brussels on 16 April 2004, and the existence of EU-MEDIN (the Euro Mediterranean Disaster Information Network) with plenty of documentation available on Internet. She also asked for voluntary evaluators to join the EU-MEDIN steering committee.

- **DG Environment, Unit A.5** (Mr. Ernst Schulte) gave a description of the forest fires activities developed by his Unit in the framework of the Community Action Programme in the field of civil protection and of the Community Mechanism to facilitate reinforced co-operation in civil protection assistance interventions. Concerning forest fires he stressed, in particular, the role of the Community to support and supplement national efforts in the field of prevention, preparedness and intervention by respecting the principle of subsidiarity: he recalled also the relevant work developed by the forest fire expert group through their regular meetings and exchanges of views and information.

- **DG Agriculture, Unit F.1** (Mr. Ignacio Seoane) outlined the main activities developed in relation with forest fires, represented by: the management of ongoing forest fire projects related to the programs 2000/01/02 of the Regulation (EEC) No2158/92; the forest measures contained inside the Rural Development Regulation (Regulation EC No 1257/99) that will expire at the end of 2006 and will be replaced by a new RDR whose proposal will be presented for
consultation before the summer break; the implementation of the report of the EU forest strategy, about to be put in the pipeline after several consultations with Member States and most relevant stakeholders.

- **DG Environment, Unit B.3 (Ms. Lorenza Colletti)** gave some background concerning the issue of forest fires prevention inside the Forest Focus regulation and describe the related measures to be co-financed by the Regulation itself. She also gave some overview on the content of the national programmes drafted according to this regulation from the EU25 Member States and still under evaluation. The questions to be answered by the working group in relation with the development of EFFIS, the classification of risk zones, the forest fire protection plans and the additional measures were as well as presented.

4. DEFINITION OF THE MANDATE AND ORGANISATION OF THE GROUP, ESTABLISHMENT OF A WORK PLAN.

In order to facilitate the work planning the Chairperson presented a draft version for the mandate of the working group prepared by the Commission.

The mandate was represented by a brief paper ("Mandate for the informal working group of forest fire prevention experts") having five sections dealing respectively with: the background for the issue, the objective, the scope, the expected outcome, the organisation of the work and working schedule.

Mr. Flics asked for comments and contributions from the participants and they basically agreed with the content of the document, suggesting only a few amendments. During the discussions held to comment the mandate and the presentations from the Commission the following aspects have been stressed by different participants:

- The need of establishing an efficient, coherent policy framework for the forest sector avoiding contradictory policies and ensuring a better co-ordination between different actors in the forest sector;

- Forest Focus regulation didn’t replace the previous Regulation (EEC) No2158/92. However this former regulation was substituted with Forest Focus as a complementary structure to the Rural Development Regulation;

- The importance of the prevention measures in general and of the educational and training activities mainly in order to raise awareness of the public;

- It would be worth to continue to link the co-financing with the classification of risk areas in order to concentrate efforts, using for this goal also the new information collected and elaborated by the JRC;

- A complete and serious exchange of experience about the results of the implementation of national forest fire protection plans would be envisaged;

- Due to the enlargement now there are areas of the European Union where the problem of forest fires differs from the classic, Mediterranean patterns and would need to be further investigated.
The Chairperson welcomed these first suggestions and stressed the importance to receive well structured recommendations; for the elaboration of these inputs the Commission will act as secretary of this group. The experts were invited to establish and keep regular contacts between themselves.

In order to collect all the documents produced by the working group and to make them available in a transparent way to the public, the establishment of a specific web-site for the group inside “Europa” has also been envisaged.

In relation with the formal establishment of the working group, the nominations of Mr. Ricardo Velez as Chairperson of the group and of Mr. Christian Pinadeau as Vice Chairperson have been accepted by the participants.

Concerning the next meetings of the group Mr. Velez suggested organising them in occasion of other events related to forest fires in order to reduce the travel burden for participants. Therefore he proposed to hold the next meeting at the end of September in Saragossa in occasion of a workshop on multilateral assistance jointly organised by Spain and FAO, the third one in Ispra at the beginning of November together with the meeting of forest fire expert group of the Civil Protection and the last one in Brussels during March next year. Exact date and locations will be fixed at a later stage and communicated in due time to the components of the group.

Mr. Flies, in order to collect and disseminate inputs coming from the experts, requested to the participants to write a short report on his/her views about the issues highlighted during the meeting and to send it before the end of June to Ms. Colletti, who will act as a secretary of the group. He also recalled the fact that the recommendations of the working group will be brought to the attention of the Member States through the Standing Forestry Committee (SFC).

Mr. Pinadeau anticipated his intention to prepare a new text dealing with the forest fire which could serve as a basis for further discussions between the experts.

The Chairperson thanked all participants for their contribution and closed the meeting.
ANNEX I

MEETING OF FOREST FIRE PREVENTION EXPERTS
Brussels, 14 may 2004, 10h00 to 17h00
Avenue de Beaulieu 9 - 4th floor, room BU 9 4/27.

AGENDA

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

2. General introduction given by the Chairperson, Mr. Robert Flies, Head of Unit ENV B3

3. Information given by the Commission on the ongoing forest fire activities in different Directorate generals and Units:
   - DG JRC IES – Mr. Jesus San-Miguel Ayanz
   - DG RTD I.2 – Ms. Karen Fabbri
   - DG ENV A.5 – Mr. Ernst Schulte
   - DG AGRI F.1 – Mr. Ignacio Seoane
   - DG ENV B.3 – Ms. Lorenza Colletti

4. Definition of the mandate of the group and establishment of a work plan;

5. Organization of the informal working group on forest fire prevention and of its sub-groups;

6. Miscellaneous.
ANNEX II

MEETING OF FOREST FIRE PREVENTION EXPERTS

Brussels, 14 May 2004

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Member States

C. Papageorgiou (Cyprus)
A. Uhlmann (Deutschland)
P. Balatsos (Ellas)
R. Vélez (España)
P. Falcone (France)
G. Cavalleri (Italia)
J. Weber (Luxembourg)
A. Szepesi (Magyarország)
M. Cruz (Portugal)
J. Jakša (Slovenija)
J. Holecy (Slovenska Republika)
L. Sandahl (Sverige)
A. J Wallis (United-Kingdom)

Non governmental organisations

D. Croon (CEPI)
P. Moura (CEPI/PT)
N. Hufnagl (CEPF)
R. Du Parc (ELO)
A. M. Piest (IUCN)
C. Pinadeau (USSE)
European Commission

R. Flies (DG ENV B.3)
I. Seoane (DG AGRI F.1)
L. Colletti (DG ENV B.3)
Z. Rakonczay (DG ENV B.3)
B. Winkler (DG ENV B.3)
E. Schulte (DG ENV A.5)
J. San Miguel-Ayanz (DG JRC H.7)
K. Fabbri (DG RTD I.2)

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