MINUTES

OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP
OF FOREST FIRE PREVENTION EXPERTS
Saragossa (ES), 28 September 2004

Chairperson:
Ricardo Vélez, Chief of the Spanish forest fires service

Agenda: Annex I
List of participants: Annex II

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The first official meeting of the informal working group of forest fire prevention experts (WGFFP) took place in Saragossa (ES) on 28 September 2004, kindly hosted by the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute (IAMZ). Participants from nine EU Member States, three Candidate countries, four non governmental organisations and two services of the Commission involved in the issue of forest fires prevention attended the meeting.

The Chairperson, together with the Director of the IAMZ, welcomed the participants and thanked them for their participation to the meeting.

The Chairperson, as a first introduction to the work, gave a detailed presentation of the most serious fire occurred in Spain during the July this year, next Sevilla - Rio Tinto, which in four days burnt more than 27,000 hectares due to very unfavourable weather conditions. The presentation was mainly meant to stress the importance of implementing field activities and actions against fires and to show the real effects of such events.

The difficulty to apply for support under the European Solidarity Fund, not specifically designed for forest fires, was also stressed.

1. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

The Chairperson outlined the main agenda items, underlining its open nature in front of any possible discussion and relevant issue.

The provisional agenda was adopted, on the basis of the proposal prepared by the Chairperson (see Annex II) and sent in advance. No any modification has been proposed.

2. PRESENTATION OF RECENT EC INITIATIVES HAVING AN IMPACT ON FOREST FIRE PREVENTION

According to the agenda Ms. Colletti from the European Commission gave a presentation on recent EC initiatives having an impact on forest fire prevention.
She started her presentation by showing the web site hosted by “Europa” and established in order to collect and spread documents and information prepared by the working group, http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/forests/home_en.htm. She stressed that, as agreed, it will be regularly updated with the main outcome of the group and asked for comments and suggestions in order to improve its structure.

After quickly describing the present situation of EU forest fires prevention measures – supported both through the Rural Development Regulation and Forest Focus - she outlined the most important proposals presented by the Commission during last months, expected to have a significant impact on any future forest fire prevention policy:


It has been explained that, according to the general principle “One instrument for policy area, one fund for programme” given by the new financial perspectives 2007-2013 in order to simplify the administrative burdens both at national and EU level, after 2006 any policy area is expected to deal with a single financial instrument.

Concerning the forest fires prevention, it has been underlined that, according to the new proposals (officially presented by the Commission but still to be negotiated with the Member States according to their national priorities) it is likely that after 2006 the “intellectual” measures (monitoring, awareness-raising campaigns, training and information) will be covered only by LIFE+ while the “field” measures (infrastructures and restoration) will be supported by the new Rural Development Regulation. This regulation will also have a broader range on forest measures, as agro-forestry support.

Answering to some questions from the participants, the representatives from the Commission said that the traditional approach – a specific regulation dealing only with forest fire prevention or even a single forest regulation – appears unlikely to be followed again in future. Therefore the need to keep a creative approach in the proposal to be presented to the Commission has been underlined: the example of financing Natura2000, expected to be supported from both the tools, the Agriculture and the Environmental regulations, has been showed and commented.

3. ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO THE WG MEMBERS

According to the mandate of the group a questionnaire on the proposals to be presented to the Commission has been prepared and sent. The Chairperson gave a general presentation on the answers received by some Member States and one non governmental organisation. He presented to the participants a “summary table” aiming to show the most relevant suggestions concerning the different points to be tackled in the proposal.

Firstly a couple of general but very relevant aspects have been already underlined:

- The need to get the maximum possible level of benefit, both for the Commission and the Member States, from the information collected in the “common core” database, already existing since several years;
The present poor understanding of fire causes inside EFFIS, while at national level usually knowledge and technologies reached a better level of detail and can contribute to further enrich the “common core” database.

It was acknowledged that the most important question is number 4, concerning a future EU regulation and some additional measures. Most of the participants strongly supported the need to continue of having a single, independent EU regulation dealing with all the forest fire preventative measures with a holistic approach as done in past. They also expressed dissatisfaction about the results of the implementation of the Rural Development Regulation in this field. However some of them also recognised the importance to start thinking about a pragmatic alternative, more in line with the general framework: anyway they expressed their big concerns towards a negative, further “dilution” of the measures inside the different policies, resulting in more competition for funds between forest, agricultural and environmental sectors at national and EU level.

Therefore it has been agreed that the issue will be tackled in more detail during next meeting, to be held in Ispra (IT) on 9 November 2004. For that date the general framework of the future actions to be launched by the European Commission would be clearer, especially in relation to the final formulation of the new environmental financial instrument, LIFE+, and with the negotiates concerning the new RDR.

The representatives from the Commission recalled the need for the working group to keep an imaginative but coherent approach, designed taking into due account also the priorities that national authorities – both in the agricultural and environmental sectors – are going to fix at national level and will negotiate between them and the Commission during coming months.

4. PROPOSALS TO BE PRESENTED TO THE EC

Mr. Velez presented a first draft of the proposals to be submitted to the European Commission, drafted according to the mandate and the answers received thanks to the questionnaire.

The in-depth analysis of the document, however, has been postponed to the Ispra meeting, when a new version updated according to the last developments will be made available. According to the remarks received the document will be soon redrafted, to get something broader and more in line with the ongoing discussions. The issue of the side effects of other policies on forest fire prevention has to be taken into special consideration.

Mr. Pinadeau insisted on the need for the group to take a clear position in favour of a single, specific regulation also in the future and to implement real actions in the field in order to prevent forest fires, as statistics alone – already existing by some 30 years - cannot solve the problem.

After some discussions it has been acknowledged that the best approach for most 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. Therefore the group basically agreed to ask for the transfer of forest fire prevention measures from RDR and Forest Focus inside a new RFFP, taking into account the strategic role played by the prevention of forest fires.

The Chairperson thanked all participants for their contribution and closed the meeting.
1. AGENDA

Place: Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza (IAMZ); Avda. Montañana, 1005; Tel: +34. 976. 716000

8.30 Departure by bus from “Hotel Alfonso I”; C/ Coso 17-19, Zaragoza to IAMZ (see map)

9.00 Opening of the meeting by Mr. R. Vélez, Chairperson of the Group and Chief of the Spain’s Forest Fire Management Service

1. Adoption of the Agenda

2. Presentation of recent EC initiatives having an impact on forest fire prevention (Forest Focus, RDR, Financial perspectives, EU Parliament debates), by L. Colletti – DG Env B3

3. Answers to the Questionnaire sent to the WG members according to the WG mandate (see Table of answers for a summary of them)

11.00 Break

11.30 3. Answers and discussions…..(continue)

4. Proposals to be presented to the EC (debate on the first draft prepared according to the Questionnaire answers)

13.30 Lunch break

15.30 4. Proposals and discussions .....(continue)

5. Miscellaneous

6. Place, date and agenda of next meeting

17.30 Closure of the meeting
Return by bus to Hotel Goya, Zaragoza
**ANNEX II**

**MEETING OF FOREST FIRE PREVENTION EXPERTS**

Saragossa (ES), 28 September 2004

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

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<tr>
<th><strong>Member States</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C. Papageorgiou</td>
<td>(Cyprus)</td>
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<td>P. Balatsos</td>
<td>(Ellas)</td>
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<td>R. Vélez</td>
<td>(España)</td>
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<td>P. Falcone</td>
<td>(France)</td>
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<td>C. Avanzo</td>
<td>(Italia)</td>
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<td>A. Szepesi</td>
<td>(Magyarország)</td>
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<td>M. Lerias da Cruz</td>
<td>(Portugal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Jakša</td>
<td>(Slovenija)</td>
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<td>A. J Wallis</td>
<td>(United-Kingdom)</td>
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<th><strong>Observer Countries</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>V. B. Konstantinov</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>S. Mara</td>
<td>Romania</td>
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<td>Y. Erdogan</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
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<th><strong>Non governmental organisations</strong></th>
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<td>P. Moura</td>
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<td>Juan Botey Serra</td>
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<td>L. Rodriguez Dias</td>
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<td>C. Pinadeau</td>
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<td>L. Colletti</td>
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