



INFORMAL COMMISSION EXPERT GROUP
FOREST AND FORESTRY STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM
TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. BACKGROUND

The new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 (COM(2021)572 final¹) proposes a new inclusive and coherent EU forest governance framework.

In the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 the Commission took the view that the wider contribution of forests to the European Green Deal objectives, as presented in the Strategy, including for climate, biodiversity and sustainable bioeconomy, necessitates a more inclusive and better coordinated EU forest governance structure, reflecting all the objectives of the new EU Forest Strategy and their interlinkages. Reinforced coordination of different policies should be ensured and a multidisciplinary exchange should be facilitated, with the involvement of a wide variety of experts and stakeholders. Given the increasing interest of the European public in the future of EU's forests, transparency of the governance should also be guaranteed so that everyone can follow how the Commission is assisted in delivering on the objectives of the new EU Forest Strategy.

In this spirit, the Commission proposes an EU forest governance system that promotes policy coherence and synergies to ensure healthy and resilient forests.

As part of this new governance, it is of utmost importance to ensure the active involvement of forest owners and managers, environmental non-governmental organisations, industry, academia, and broader civil society representatives to discuss forest policy matters. Building on the experience of the existing Civil Dialogue Group on Forestry and Cork and the Working Group on Forest and Nature, the Commission aims to create a single stakeholder platform (expert group called 'Forest and Forestry Stakeholder Platform') to assist the Commission's services (DG Agriculture and Rural Development, DG Environment, and DG Climate Action) in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy for 2030. The present Terms of Reference relate to this latter group.

The group is expected to operate as long as needed for the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy for 2030.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0572> (COM(2021)572 final)

2. SUBJECT MATTER

The Forest and Forestry Stakeholder Platform ('the Platform') is set up.

3. TASKS

The Platform's tasks shall be:

- (a) to hold a regular dialogue on all matters relating to forests and forestry, in particular as regards the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy for 2030;
- (b) when specific expertise is required, to provide advice to the Commission, and to assist the responsible Commission's services in the preparation of policy initiatives in this field;
- (c) to bring about an exchange of experience and good practice, including dissemination of information, including in the field of Sustainable Forest Management;
- (d) to deliver an opinion on specific matters either upon request of the Commission services and within the time limits set in that request, or on their own initiative;
- (e) to monitor policy developments in the fields of forests and forestry.

4. CONSULTATION

The Commission services may consult the Platform and its sub-groups on different matters relating to forests and forestry.

5. MEMBERSHIP

1. The Platform shall be composed of stakeholders' organisations operating at Union level or at least in several Member States in the field of forests and forestry.
2. A limited number of other public entities (maximum five) operating at Union level in the field of forests and forestry could also be invited as members.
3. Organisations shall nominate their representatives and shall be responsible for ensuring that their representatives provide a high level of expertise according to the items on the agenda. The relevant Commission services may refuse the nomination by an organisation of a representative if it considers this nomination inappropriate in the light of the requirements specified in the call for applications. In such case, the organisation concerned shall be asked to appoint another representative.
4. Members who are no longer capable of contributing effectively to the Platform's deliberations, who, in the opinion of the Commission services involved, do not comply with the conditions set out in Article 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union or who resign, shall no longer be invited to participate in any meetings of the Platform and may be replaced for the remainder of their term of office.

6. SELECTION PROCESS

1. The selection of the Platform's members shall be carried out via a public call for applications, to be published on the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities ('the Register of expert groups'). In addition, the call for applications may be published through other means, including on dedicated websites. The call for applications shall clearly outline the selection criteria, including the required expertise and the interests to be represented in relation to the work to be performed. The minimum deadline for applications shall be four weeks.
2. Registration in the Transparency Register is required in order for organisations to be appointed.
3. The members of the Platform shall be appointed by the the Directors-General of DG Agriculture and Rural Development and DG Environment from applicants with competence in the areas referred to in point 3 and who have responded to the call for applications.
4. Members shall be appointed for five years. They shall remain in office until the end of their term of office. Their term of office may be renewed.

7. CHAIR

The Platform shall be chaired by a representative of the Commission.

8. OPERATION

1. The Platform shall act at the request of the relevant Commission services, in compliance with the horizontal rules².
2. Meetings of the Platform shall, in principle, be held on Commission premises or virtually, depending on the circumstances.
3. DG Agriculture and Rural Development and DG Environment shall provide secretarial services. Commission officials from other departments with an interest in the proceedings will be called to attend meetings of the Platform.
4. In agreement with the Commission services, the Platform may, by simple majority of its members, decide that deliberations shall be public.
5. Minutes on the discussion on each point on the agenda and on the opinions delivered by the Platform shall be meaningful and complete. Minutes shall be drafted by the secretariat under the responsibility of the Chair.
6. As far as possible, the Platform shall adopt its opinions, recommendations or reports by consensus.

9. SUB-GROUPS

1. The responsible Commission services may set up sub-groups for the purpose of examining specific questions on the basis of terms of reference defined by the Commission's DGs in charge. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with the

² C(2016) 3301, Article 13.1.

horizontal rules and shall report to the group. They shall be dissolved as soon as their mandate is fulfilled.

2. The members of sub-groups that are not members of the group shall be selected via a public call for applications, in compliance with point 6 and the horizontal rules³.

10. INVITED EXPERTS

The Commission services may invite experts with specific expertise with respect to a subject matter on the agenda to take part in the work of the Platform or sub-groups on an *ad hoc* basis.

11. OBSERVERS

1. Individuals, organisations and public entities other than Member States' authorities may be granted an observer status, in compliance with the horizontal rules, by direct invitation.
2. Organisations and public entities appointed as observers shall nominate their representatives.
3. Observers and their representatives may be permitted by the Chair to take part in the discussions of the Platform and its sub-groups and provide expertise. However, they shall not participate in the formulation of recommendations or advice of the Platform.

12. RULES OF PROCEDURE

On a proposal by and in agreement with the Commission services the Platform shall adopt its rules of procedure by simple majority of its members, on the basis of the standard rules of procedure for expert groups, in compliance with the horizontal rules⁴. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with the Platform's rules of procedure.

13. PROFESSIONAL SECRECY AND HANDLING OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

The members of the Platform and their representatives, as well as invited experts and observers, are subject to the obligation of professional secrecy, which by virtue of the Treaties and the rules implementing them applies to all members of the institutions and their staff, as well as to the Commission's rules on security regarding the protection of Union classified information, laid down in Commission Decisions (EU, Euratom) 2015/443⁵ and 2015/444⁶. Should they fail to respect these obligations, the Commission may take all appropriate measures.

³ C(2016), Articles 10 and 14.2.

⁴ See Article 17 of the horizontal rules.

⁵ Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/443 of 13 March 2015 on Security in the Commission (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 41).

⁶ Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444 of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

14. TRANSPARENCY

1. The Platform and its sub-groups shall be registered in the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities ('the Register of expert groups').
2. As regards the Platform's composition and the one of its sub-groups, the following data shall be published on the Register of expert groups:
 - (a) the name of member organisations; the interest represented shall be disclosed;
 - (b) the name of observers.
3. All relevant documents, including the agendas, the minutes and the participants' submissions, shall be made available via a link from the Register to a dedicated website, where this information can be found. Access to dedicated websites shall not be submitted to user registration or any other restriction. In particular, the Commission services shall publish the agenda and other relevant background documents in due time ahead of the meeting, followed by timely publication of minutes. Exceptions to publication shall only be possible where it is deemed that disclosure of a document would undermine the protection of a public or private interest as defined in Article 4 of Regulation (EC) N° 1049/2001⁷.

15. MEETING EXPENSES

1. Participants in the activities of the Platform and its sub-groups shall not be remunerated for the services they offer.
2. Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by participants in the activities of the Platform and its sub-groups shall be reimbursed by the Commission. Reimbursement shall be made in accordance with the provisions in force within the Commission and within the limits of the available appropriations allocated to the Commission departments under the annual procedure for the allocation of resources.

Done in Brussels, on 19/10/2022.

⁷ These exceptions are intended to protect public security, military affairs, international relations, financial, monetary or economic policy, privacy and integrity of the individual, commercial interests, court proceedings and legal advice, inspections/investigations/audits and the institution's decision-making process.