

The most crucial challenges facing Europe's forests

NGO recommendations for the Parliament's own initiative report on EU Forest Strategy

The own initiative report of the European Parliament on the EU Forest Strategy, led by the Committee of Agriculture and Rural Development and MEP Elisabeth Köstinger (EPP) offers an opportunity to the Parliament to highlight risks that forests face and to emphasise the necessary guiding principles for future EU policies.

In this brief, **BirdLife Europe, European Environmental Bureau and FERN** underline some key risks facing European forests, forest based industries and prospects for a sustainable bioeconomy. It also aims to clarify the pivotal role that (future) EU policies on climate and energy, the circular economy and nature conservation play in relation to forests, and provides the necessary recommendations. We call upon the European Parliament to request the Commission to work on appropriate proposals to address these risks in the implementation of the Forest Strategy and recommend it should raise the following issues:

1. INCREASING DEMAND FOR TIMBER PRODUCTS AND WOOD FOR ENERGY ARE EXCEEDING EUROPEAN FORESTS' SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY

Competing demand for wood in the EU has steadily grown over the last decade, not in the least because of its subsidized use for energy generation. The concern that follows is that the further intensification of forest practices will progressively decrease the carbon storage capacity of forests and lead to more biodiversity losses.

At the moment, the renewable energy share is largely met by supply from woody biomass. If no limitations on the use of wood for energy will be put in place, the foreseen 27% share of renewable energy in 2030 will exceed the [low risk supply of wood](#) from forests, residues and waste streams. One could expect an even higher pressure on forests when taking into account a rapidly growing bioeconomy that aims to phase out petrochemicals.

The current models and methodology of sustainable forest management do not adequately address these concerns stemming from an increasing demand of forest products and fail to protect the different ecological, economic and social functions that forests can serve. It is therefore not legitimate to present sustainable forest management as a silver bullet for all risks that forests are confronted with.

We call on the European Parliament to include these points in the own-initiative report on the Forest Strategy:

- To recognise that encouraging the efficient use of wood as a resource has the potential to mitigate the increasing pressure on forests by growing demands for timber products and wood for energy.
- To recognise the challenges and trade-offs resulting from the increasing demand of wood for materials, energy and the bioeconomy, and to recognise that the concept of sustainable forest management currently not addresses these challenges adequately.
- To request the European Commission to include, as part of the renewable energy policy framework, safeguards for bioenergy that limits the demand for wood for energy to available sustainable supply of residues and co-products.

2. FOREST ECOSYSTEMS ARE AMONG THE MOST DEGRADED HABITATS IN EU; 60% HAVE UNFAVOURABLE BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STATUS

Many of the vulnerable habitats and species in forests across the EU have [an unfavourable conservation status](#) today. Although the EU recognizes the “principle of multifunctionality” of forests, which - in theory - gives equal importance to ecological, economic and social factors, in practice economic and industrial uses have prevailed. This has led to a serious loss of biodiversity and hampered the capacity of European forests to mitigate climate change. This underlines the need for measures that aim to improve the carbon stocks of forests as well as biodiversity of forest ecosystems.

The EU is committed to halting biodiversity loss and has effective legal tools, such as the Birds and Habitats Directives, to effectively protect forests and species. However, the implementation and enforcement of these Directives are currently insufficient to ensure an adequate protection of forest biodiversity and ecosystem services. Both Member States as well as the European Commission lack the necessary funds to respectively enforce domestic laws at local and regional levels or start infringement procedures in the case a Member State does not comply with EU biodiversity laws.

We call on the European Parliament to include these points in the own-initiative report on the Forest Strategy:

- Recognize the shortcomings of the current model of sustainable forest management and request the Commission to address these shortcomings when developing EU criteria for SFM with concrete benchmarks and thresholds e.g. on the amount of dead wood, measures taken to increase it, amount of forests in the Natura 2000 networks with a management plan and use of low impact silviculture.
- Request the Commission to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the Birds and Habitats Directives, including adequate management plans for Natura 2000 areas and to assess whether sufficient funds have been ring-fenced for the protection of forests in Natura 2000 areas during the implementation of the current multi-annual financial framework.
- Request the Commission to develop a plan to make funds available to assess the correct transposition and implementation of biodiversity laws in Member States.
- To recognize the limited uptake of rural development funds for sustainable forest management and the need to ensure Member States make more funds available for protecting forests for their environmental and social value.

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