Brussels, 12 October 2013

Proposals for the responses of the Council of Ministers and European Parliament to the EU Forest Strategy

FSC welcomes the new EU Forest Strategy, published on 20th September 2013, as it highlights the importance of (European) forests for EUs economy, employment and environment and it sets the right guiding principles for forest and forest goods and services, including sustainable forest management, forest protection, resource efficiency and global responsibility.

However, while its says the Strategy and its implementation “should build on existing legislation and international initiatives[...], consider the special situation of small forest owners, and address market-based private-sector tools such as certification”, it does not “address” certification at all in the operational parts of the Strategy.

This is remarkable because more than half of EU’s forest cover is certified by private schemes such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Forest certification therewith covers more than twice the forest area under Natura 2000. On top of the impact these schemes have on forest management, through their chain-of-custody and labelling practices they also make it possible for industry, public procurers and private consumers to choose for responsibly sourced wood and wood-based products, and are instrumental in EU policies such as the new EU Timber Regulation, EU Ecolabels and Green Public Procurement Criteria.

We call upon the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament to include, in its responses to the Strategy:

- Recognition that more than half of the EU’s forest surface falls under private forest certification schemes that aim to ensure sustainable forest management;
- Recognition that such schemes are increasingly successful in motivating industry, public procurers and consumers to support sustainable forest management with their purchasing practices;
- Recognition that so far these schemes are playing a role in the implementation of EU policies to seek legal and sustainable sourcing, also for wood and wood based products from outside the EU.
- A call upon the Commission and Member States to evaluate and recognise the impacts of the individual schemes active in the EU, and elsewhere, in terms of ensuring sustainable forest management in practice;
- A call upon the Commission and Member States to evaluate whether group certification schemes can help overcoming the constraints of fragmented private ownership in parts of the EU, in terms of organising forest owners in groups and providing them access to markets. And to consider offering Rural Development Funds in particular as seed money for group certification.
- A call upon the Commission, as regards the global responsibility dimension of the Strategy, to, as part and in addition to its FLEGT activities, promote the use of transparent, effective, balanced multi stakeholder governed forest and chain-of-custody certification systems world wide.

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