European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry aisbl

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PRESS RELEASE: The new European Forest Strategy is not addressing the sawmill industry supply challenges

Released today, the European Forest Strategy fails to recognise the complexity of the forest-based industry. While the European sawmill industry welcomes that the role of long-lived wood products in the decarbonization of the economy is mostly recognized, the Strategy:

1. disregards the supply needs of the industry, and is too unbalanced towards the social and environmental function of forests
2. puts forward a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach in the utilisation of wood products, far from the reality and specificities of local European market conditions.

More than ever before, forests and forest products are rightly sought-after for their role in mitigating climate change impacts. Forests capture and sequester large quantities of carbon, and forest products can be used instead of other materials that generate large volumes of greenhouse gases. The silvicultural scenarios and practices proposed in the Strategy should ensure the sustainable provision in the medium- and long-term of raw materials for European bioeconomy and at the same time enable forests to store more carbon and make them more resilient to simultaneously withstand and combat climate change.

The new Commission document omits to deal with the identification of appropriate measures for increasing the market supply of wood from fragmented ownership structures and does not address the issue of enhancing competitiveness and general conditions in the forest and wood-based industries that supply the bioeconomy. An effective Sustainable Forest Management Strategy should aim to strengthen the economic component in harmony with undertakings made in the social and environmental components.

The sawmill industry makes and markets products with a small carbon footprint from raw material procured from sustainably managed forests, overwhelmingly European forests. Over 90% of logs used by the European Sawmill Industry come from European Forests. What many people do not realise is that to create healthy forests you need to sell the wood they produce. Landowners need income to pay ongoing costs for forest management activities including fire prevention works, maintaining roads and clearing out invasive species, as well as to cover annual property taxes. Income from wood can help with this and encourage landowners to invest in sustainable forest management.

A crucial factor in the sawmill sector is the future availability of wood. Comprehensive analyses and investigations of the entire wood value chain with its multilevel interdependences in wood use and wood supply changes, are missing in the Strategy. For this reason, it was of the utmost importance that the Forest Strategy put forward climate policy objectives that do not neglect the need for a sustainable mobilization of wood resources, encouragement for afforestation & reforestation measures - taking into consideration both environmental and economic needs - and finally assessment of the impact of decisions affecting the use of forest resources. The importance of improved logistics to the mobilization of wood, particularly in mountainous areas, is neglected in the document.

The European Forest Strategy does not acknowledge the existence of local market conditions and specificities that invalidate some of its sweeping statements on the cascading use of wood, which cannot be applied rigidly across Europe. Given the widely differing situation across Member States and regions, an EU-level application of this principle is not feasible.

All parts of the tree are used efficiently by the forest-based industries resulting in both long and short-lived products being produced simultaneously. Thus, all different wood-based products and bioenergy are essential for a successful transition to a fossil free and circular bioeconomy.

Timber legality and forest certification are also priorities for the sawmill industry to show its sustainability and total opposition to any form of illegal logging. Certification is already based on independent third party audit of compliance against strict social, economic and environmental criteria. No new scheme that adds to the already heavy bureaucratic load of the industry can be afford.

The European Sawmill Industry needs to be attuned to changes in market circumstances and be capable of responding to new opportunities as they arise in the market. It will need to be supported by research and innovation and sustained through strategic marketing in order to enable competitiveness in national and international markets.

European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry (EOS)

Through its member federations and associated members, the European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry (EOS) represents thousands of sawmills manufacturing sawn boards, timber frames, glulam, decking, flooring, joinery, fencing and several other wood products. Together they represent around 80% of the total European sawn wood output in a sector that has a turnover of around 35 billion EUR and employs about 250,000 people in the EU. The European Sawmill Industry recognises that it is imperative to combat climate change and at the same time avoid curbing economic and social development. Sustainably managed forests and products derived from these forests play an essential role in mitigating climate change by reducing greenhouse gases emissions and contribute to an environmental-friendly economic growth. The positive effects of using wood from sustainably managed forests can be strengthened if actions are taken to use more long-life wood products.

Visit our website: https://www.eos-oes.eu/en/index.php

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