



Commission steps up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests

Brussels, 23 July 2019

Today the European Commission adopted a comprehensive Communication setting out a new framework of actions to protect and restore the world's forests, which host 80% of biodiversity on land, support the livelihoods of around a quarter of the world's population, and are vital to our efforts to fight climate change.

The reinforced approach announced today addresses both the supply and demand side of the issue. It introduces measures for enhanced international cooperation with stakeholders and Member States, promotion of sustainable finance, better use of land and resources, sustainable job creation and supply chain management, and targeted research and data collection. It also launches an assessment of possible new regulatory measures to minimise the impact of EU consumption on deforestation and forest degradation.

First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans**, responsible for sustainable development, said: *"Forests are the green lungs of our planet, and we must care for them in the same way we care for our own lungs. We will not meet our climate targets without protecting the world's forests. The EU does not host the world's major primary forests on its territory, but our actions as individuals and our policy choices have a major impact. Today we send an important signal to our citizens and to our partners around the world that the EU is prepared to play a leadership role in this area in the next five years, and beyond."*

Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness, said: *"The world's forest cover continues to decrease at an alarming rate. With this Communication, we are stepping up EU action to protect existing forests better and manage forests sustainably. When we protect existing forests and increase forest cover sustainably, we safeguard livelihoods and increase the income of local communities. Forests also represent a promising green economic sector, with the potential to create between 10 and 16 million decent jobs worldwide. This Communication represents an important step forward in this regard."*

Commissioner for environment, maritime affairs and fisheries, Karmenu **Vella** added: *"Stronger and more effective European action is needed to protect and restore forests because the situation remains fragile, despite efforts already made. Deforestation has a destructive effect on biodiversity, climate and economy."*

Commissioner for International Development, Neven **Mimica**, said: *"We stand ready to work with partner countries to protect and sustainably manage forests across the world. This is about food security, water, climate change, resilience and peace. It's about building a more sustainable and inclusive world."*

The ambitious European approach outlined today is a response to the continued widespread destruction of the world's forests; an area of 1.3 million square kilometres was lost between 1990 and 2016, equivalent to approximately 800 football fields every hour. The main drivers of this deforestation are demand for food, feed, biofuel, timber and other commodities.

Greenhouse gas emissions linked to deforestation are the second biggest cause of climate change, so protecting forests is a significant part of our responsibility to meet the commitments under the Paris Agreement. From an economic and social perspective, forests support the livelihoods of around 25 % of the global population, and they also embody irreplaceable cultural, societal and spiritual values.

The Communication adopted today has a two-fold objective of protecting and improving the health of existing forests, especially primary forests, and significantly increasing sustainable, biodiverse forest coverage worldwide. The Commission has set out five priorities:

- Reduce the EU consumption footprint on land and encourage the consumption of products from deforestation-free supply chains in the EU;
- Work in partnership with producing countries to reduce pressures on forests and to "deforest-proof" EU development cooperation;
- Strengthen international cooperation to halt deforestation and forest degradation, and encourage forest restoration;

- Redirect finance to support more sustainable land-use practices;
- Support the availability of, quality of, and access to information on forests and commodity supply chains, and support research and innovation.

Actions to reduce EU consumption and encourage the use of products from deforestation-free supply chains will be explored through the creation of a new Multi-Stakeholder Platform on Deforestation, Forest Degradation and Forest Generation, which will bring together a broad range of relevant stakeholders. The Commission will also encourage stronger certification schemes for deforestation-free products and assess possible demand-side legislative measures and other incentives.

The Commission **will work closely with partner countries** to help them to reduce pressures on their forests, and will ensure that EU policies do not contribute to deforestation and forest degradation. It will help partners develop and implement comprehensive national frameworks on forests, enhancing the sustainable use of forests, and increasing the sustainability of forest-based value chains. The Commission will also **work through international fora** - such as the FAO, the UN, the G7 and G20, the WTO and the OECD - to strengthen cooperation on actions and policies in this field. The Commission will continue to ensure that trade agreements negotiated by the EU contribute to the responsible and sustainable management of global supply chains, and encourage trade of agricultural and forest-based products not causing deforestation or forest degradation. The Commission will also develop incentive mechanisms for smallholder farmers to maintain and enhance ecosystem services and embrace sustainable agriculture and forest management.

To improve the **availability and quality of information, and access to information** on forests and supply chains, the Commission proposes the creation of an EU Observatory on Deforestation and Forest Degradation, to monitor and measure changes in the world's forest cover and associated drivers. This resource will give public bodies, consumers and businesses better access to information about supply chains, encouraging them to become more sustainable. The Commission will also explore the possibility of strengthening the use of the Copernicus satellite system for forest monitoring.

The Commission will focus on **redirecting public and private finance** to help to create incentives for sustainable forest management and sustainable forest-based value chains, and for conservation of existing and sustainable regeneration of additional forest cover. Together with the Member States, the Commission will assess mechanisms with the potential to foster green finance for forests and further leverage and increase funding.

Background

The EU has a strong track record of global leadership in this area. Since 2003, the EU has been implementing the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan (FLEGT) to fight illegal logging and associated trade. A 2008 Commission Communication on deforestation set out the initial elements of an EU policy framework, including an EU objective to halt global forest cover loss by 2030 and to reduce gross tropical deforestation by 50 % by 2020. Despite its efforts, the EU objectives established in 2008 are unlikely to be met. Stronger efforts are therefore indispensable.

Today's Communication comes after extensive stakeholder consultations on deforestation and forest degradation and possible EU action. This included two conferences in 2014 and 2017, a public consultation in 2019, and three studies. The Communication also comes in response to repeated requests from the Council and European Parliament, calling for more coordinated action in particular via the elimination of deforestation from agricultural commodity chains.

Forests play a major role in the biggest sustainability challenges of our time, such as biodiversity decline, climate change and population increase. International agreements and commitments acknowledge the need for ambitious action to reverse the deforestation trend.

Emissions from land use and land use change, mostly due to deforestation, are the second largest cause of climate change (after fossil fuels), accounting for nearly 12 % of all greenhouse gas emissions, more than the transport sector. The world's forests store large amounts of carbon, which is drawn down from the atmosphere and stored in biomass and soil. Halting deforestation and forest degradation is therefore crucial to fight climate change. Sustainably restoring degraded forests and creating new forests can be an effective complementary measure to the efforts to halt deforestation. If properly planned and implemented in full respect for the principles of sustainability, such reforested areas can provide multiple benefits.

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