

Wood Protects our Climate and Creates Jobs



Joint declaration of the Forst Holz Papier value chain on the EU forest strategy

The renewable resource wood is one of the essential factors for a bio-based economy and a key element in the fight against climate change.

On 16 July 2021, the European Commission presented the EU Forest Strategy for 2030. Even though the strategy stresses enhancing timber construction as a measure for climate protection, the wood-based sector is deeply concerned about the strategy's overall impact. Above all, the forest-related measures of this EU Forest Strategy harbour not only the potential of unnecessarily raising the price of sustainable wood production, but also of drastically reducing the volume of sustainable wood harvests in Europe. According to calculations by the Thünen Institute, wood use in the EU 27 would decrease by 42%. Wood will then have to be imported from third states such as the USA, Russia, Canada and Brazil; all countries with lower forestry standards than Europe. The intended measures would thus make the necessary, rapid transition to a climate friendly, bio-based future impossible.

Representatives of the Forst Holz Papier (Forest Wood Paper) value chain in Austria are therefore calling upon the European Commission to rethink this fundamentally. When implementing the EU Forest Strategy, we believe that the following facts need to be taken into account:

1) Recognising facts and rewarding achievements

The forested area in Europe has increased by 14 million hectares, while wood reserves have grown by 8.3 billion cubic metres since 1990. Most parameters relevant for biological diversity have improved in the forest. Forest owners have made enormous advanced payments as regards climate and biodiversity protection at their own expenses, and have therefore assumed a leading role in that respect. Rising wood reserves and improved biodiversity indicators prove that biodiversity and the use of wood do not contradict each other in any way. The impression is being created that the forest needs to be protected against management – precisely the opposite is the case: Sustainable forestry promotes a stable forest and supports the diversity of ecosystems

If forest owners are to strengthen specific effects of the forest, these services on behalf of the ecosystem also need to be fairly rewarded and thus forest tending and sustainable management are to be reinforced. We expect political stakeholders to refuse to support measures whose impact contradicts this approach.

2) Protecting the climate through the use of wood

The rapid withdrawal of fossil resources is vital for an effective climate protection. Sustainably managed forests in the European Union play a pivotal role for the secure supply of wood. A climate-friendly society uses wood for both long lasting products and for a number of everyday goods. Fossil-based and CO₂-intensive products can be replaced by wood products for the purpose of biogenic carbon cycles. Avoiding fossil-based emissions has a long-lasting impact, which exceeds that of forest's storage capacity. The imposed closure of forest areas would contribute to solving the climate crisis only in the very short term and to a very limited extent.

European politics must vigorously press ahead with the transition to an all-encompassing bioeconomy. In order to leverage bioeconomy and energy transition and thus climate protection, it is necessary to use fully the potential of sustainable production of biomass.

3) Creating climate-fit forests

Climate change will dramatically alter regional forests. Climate-fit forests are paramount for the future of Europe – from an economic, social and ecological perspective. The sustainable supply of the raw material wood is at least just as important for society as recreation, preservation of biodiversity, and protection against natural hazards. The multi-functional management of Europe's forests has been a global success story. Against the background of worsening climate conditions, silvicultural measures for minimising the risk of forest damages as well as increasing the resilience of forest ecosystems need to be strengthened.

Politics must support forest owners to adapt their forests to climate change without any ideologies. This also requires a guarantee that the 16 million forest farming families will be able to obtain a sufficient income when managing their land in future, too. This implies the continued right to dispose freely of one's property as enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

4) Securing raw material supply and jobs

Wood represents a renewable resource that is sufficiently available in the European Union based on a multi-functional forest management focused on sustainability. Compared with fossil -based resources that are damaging the climate, wood does not need to be imported in large quantities from outside the EU. Europe is able to supply itself with this very important raw material, and – through generating high level of added value and exports – secures around 2.2 million jobs, especially in rural areas.

In order not endanger the wood sector's competitiveness and to avoid „leakage effects“, sustainable forest management needs to be strengthened and must not be weakened by unnecessary bans, further management limitations, detailed regulations and new certification systems.

5) Cascaded wood use is a living circular economy principle

The European Union's economic success is based on the principle of an eco-social market economy. This basic principle also requires that means of production are under private ownership and their market exploitation can be freely decided upon. For instance, in Austria 80% of the annual fresh wood volumes provided by felling and timber flows from neighbouring regions are fed into the wood utilisation cascade through purely market-based mechanisms.

Also in the future each market players must be free to decide to whom they sell their product and at what price. Any regulation of flows of timber via the European Commission's „delegated acts“, which suspend basic market principles, is strictly rejected.

The signatories consider this joint declaration of the entire Forst Holz Papier value chain as a reinforcement of the Vienna Declaration dated 4 October 2021, as the important issue of raw materials basis affects sectors of the wood industry in equal measure.

ÖkR Rudolf Rosenstatter
Chairman of the cooperation platform FHP

Franz Kepplinger
Chairman of the Association of Forest Farmers OÖ

ÖkR DI Felix Montecuccoli
President of the Association of Land & Forest Owners in Austria

Dr. Kurt Maier
President Austropapier - Association of the Austrian Paper Industry

Mag. Herbert Jöbstl
Chairman Association of the Austrian Wood Industries

Mag. Dr. Erifried Taurer
Speaker of the Austrian Wood Based Panel Industry

ÖkR Franz Titschenbacher
Chairman of the forestry committee LKÖ

Dr. Erich Wiesner
Designated Chairman of the cooperation platform FHP

Dr. Andreas Ludwig
Vice Chairman of the Austrian Wood Industries