



Council of the  
European Union

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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
To: Delegations

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Subject: The World's Forests for a Sustainable Future  
– *Agriculture and Fisheries Council of 16-17 December 2019: Lunch  
debate*

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With a view to the debate among the Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers, Commissioners and the FAO Director General over lunch on 16 December 2019, delegations will find attached a Presidency background note and a question to steer the debate.

## **The World's Forests for a Sustainable Future**

Forests contribute significantly to the 2030 Agenda and various Sustainable Development Goals. They provide solutions for the future in a holistic way, encompassing climate and biodiversity, natural resources such as water, transformation towards a sustainable bio-based circular economy, and wellbeing and livelihoods in rural areas, to name just a few aspects. Various land use changes, including agricultural expansion, have an important impact on the world's forests, and the EU and its Member States are committed to strengthening sustainable forests and forestry worldwide.

Forests host 80 % of biodiversity on land, support the livelihoods of around a quarter of the world's population, are vital to our efforts to fight climate change, and embody other irreplaceable values. The world's forests are particularly vulnerable due to pressure from, for example, unsustainable land use and management practices, natural disturbances and climate change.

It is clear that ambitious action is urgently needed. The Commission Communication on stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests is an important step forward in this regard. The Communication's goals and scope, including five priority areas, are highly relevant in terms of combatting deforestation and forest degradation.

The Council endorses the objectives of the Communication and expresses its support for and commitment to the efficient and urgent implementation of the actions in the Communication. The Communication provides the means for the EU and its Member States to intensify work to strengthen approaches to forests, including through sustainable forest management, protection, afforestation/reforestation, and restoration for the benefit of sustainable development, livelihoods and poverty eradication.

Addressing the drivers of deforestation requires effective partnerships and cross-sectoral approaches. The Communication provides an overarching and holistic approach to forests and strengthens linkages to agriculture, environment, trade and development cooperation.

To contribute at a global level, the EU needs a policy framework that coordinates and ensures the coherence of forest-related policies and allows for synergies with other sectors that influence forest management. The current EU Forest Strategy runs until 2020. Preparation of the new forest strategy for the EU also provides an excellent opportunity to strengthen coherence with international forest issues.

Good-quality research and data management are the basis for policy-making in the forest sector and implementation on the ground. International institutions such as FAO provide valuable assets, including global data on forests. FAO's Global Forest Resource Assessment comprises standardised data collected by national authorities. FAO has succeeded in gaining access to and working together with the key actors at the local level who work on protecting and restoring the world's forests, and promoting livelihoods.

*Question: How can increased EU action on the world's forests be stimulated through supporting sustainable forest management, including afforestation and forest protection?*