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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Delegations

Subject: AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council of
26 May 2026:
Meeting of Directors-General for Forests (Paphos, 27–29 April 2026)
- Information from the Presidency

From 27 to 29 April 2026, an informal meeting of EU Directors-General for Forests was held under the Cyprus Presidency. The discussions took place in Pafos, with the field visit organised in the Pafos Forest, in the Pafos District. The meeting focused on climate change and the challenges of forest ecosystem management, with particular emphasis on forest fires and biodiversity.

Delegations from 23 EU Member States participated, alongside representatives from key stakeholder organisations, including the European Forest Institute (EFI) and its FoRISK Facility, the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR), the Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF), COPA-COGECA, and the European Commission.

The discussion session was preceded by presentations outlining Cyprus's approach to the main theme, as well as contributions from the European Commission (DG AGRI and DG ENV), the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the FoRISK Facility of European Forest Institute, and Dr. G. Xanthopoulos (forest fire expert), in addition to Member State interventions. Delegations, stakeholders, and the Commission engaged in a roundtable exchange of views.

The discussion emphasized that sustainable forest management is central to wildfire risk management, with broad agreement among Member States that measures such as active forest management including fuel reduction, structural diversification, grazing, and prescribed burning are essential to reduce risks.

It also emphasized that climate change is significantly increasing wildfire risks across Europe, including in regions not traditionally affected, due to rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and more unpredictable weather patterns.

The discussion highlighted the need for integrated and coordinated governance, involving multiple sectors such as forestry, civil protection, agriculture, land-use planning, and environmental authorities, as well as strong cooperation between national and EU levels.

A clear priority emerged on prevention over suppression, with Member States underlining the importance of early detection systems, risk mapping, hydrological restoration, and landscape-level planning, while still recognising the need for effective firefighting capacity and infrastructure, along with adequately trained personnel.

It further emphasized that land-use and landscape management are key factors, with challenges such as land abandonment and depopulation increasing fire risks, and the need to maintain actively managed and resilient rural landscapes.

The discussion also pointed to the growing role of technology and data, including monitoring systems, meteorological services, and early warning tools, in improving preparedness and response.

Strong links were identified between wildfire prevention, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, and the bioeconomy, with many noting that these objectives are complementary and can be mutually reinforcing.

In addition, the discussion emphasized the importance of public awareness, education, and social factors, including the role of forest owners and local communities in reducing wildfire risks.

Finally, Member States highlighted the need for adequate financing and EU support, including through instruments such as the CAP and the MFF, as well as the value of knowledge sharing, cooperation, and exchange of best practices across countries and stakeholders.

The field programme featured a presentation on fire protection strategies, including prevention, preparedness, and suppression. A coordinated demonstration followed, involving fire engines, bulldozers, and a flyover by two firefighting aircraft. Participants also discussed the role of picnic areas as tools for managing human presence in forests. Conservation initiatives were presented, including the LIFE-KEDROS project and targeted silvicultural interventions (both *in-situ* and *ex-situ*) aimed at enhancing species resilience to climate change. The field visit concluded with a short walk through a cedar stand.
