

# SCAR Strategic Working Group on Forests and Forestry Research and Innovation

## FOREST 4<sup>th</sup> Mandate

This document is to be presented first to the Steering Group and then to the Plenary of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR), respectively in April and June 2023. It aims at obtaining approval for a three-year extension period of SCAR SWG FOREST from 01/07/2023 to 30/06/2026.

### European forest and forestry background

Forests cover 35% of Europe's total land area, an area equivalent to Europe's agricultural land (Forest Europe 2020). Removals from European forests are less than their growth increment, resulting in a growing stock that has been increasing in the last decades. However, this increasing trend is slowing down. Roundwood production from European forests has been growing, reaching 500–550 million m<sup>3</sup> annually. The reported total value of marketed roundwood is also increasing and reached about EUR 21 000 million annually in 2015. The European forest sector provided jobs to 2.6–3.5 million employees in 2015.

In addition to their high economic importance, European forests provide a wide set of environmental benefits. They are a major carbon sink: in the EU-28, carbon sequestration by forests corresponds to around 10% of gross greenhouse gas emissions. Forests also harbour the greatest part of terrestrial biodiversity, and scientific knowledge is increasing on the importance of forests on human wellbeing and health. This means that European forests are increasingly subjected to various needs, as, in addition with wood and energy production, pressure is put on forest carbon sinks, biodiversity protection, and wellbeing benefits. Over the past 20 years, the area of forests designated for biodiversity conservation has increased by about 65%. Protected forests account for almost a quarter of the total forest area. A strong and sustainable European forest sector requires that the strengthening of supply chains security is reconciled with climate, biodiversity and wellbeing targets, and contributes to a reduction in imported deforestation.

Global climate change, degradation of biodiversity and land degradation are negatively impacting European forests. Defoliation and forest dieback are increasing due to climate change, extreme drought and heat waves, and pest outbreaks. Forest

fires are more widely occurring. High-density populations of large ungulates and increased ungulate browsing is also an European-wide disturbance that affects both commercial and protected forest. Provided that the resilience of both forest ecosystems and the forest sector is ensured, forests are part of the solutions to tackle both the global and the European changes and challenges. In addition to the carbon stored in living biomass, wood products can be a carbon sink. Wood can substitute fossil fuels and high embodied energy materials such as steel and concrete. By strengthening their role in a circular bioeconomy, forests can contribute to making our societies and economies more sustainable, by helping to decarbonise not just the land use sector, but also other sectors such as the built environment.

## Rationale for SCAR SWG FOREST

Scientific rigour is needed to address the multiple challenges faced by forests and the forest sector. Forest and forestry are domains where transnational co-programming and research are critical enablers in addressing the multi-region challenges which require multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary approaches (e.g. displacement of tree species distribution ranges with climate change; exchanges of wood reproductive material; reconciling forest management with carbon management, biodiversity and wellbeing targets; mitigation of forest fires; and development of new European and global value chains or trade patterns). Hence, European co-programming of forest research and the reinforcement of a European research area on forest and forestry are vital to allow countries to maximise benefits and are greater than the sum of its parts.

Building a research area for forests and forestry is all the more important as questions and challenges in forestry touch on many related topics such as carbon management, biodiversity, human wellbeing, rural development and economy. Disaggregating the forest into biodiversity, carbon or economic questions would run the risk of missing the synergies or trade-offs that need to be found between these challenges. The forest is on the contrary a relevant research object to integrate these questions. Moreover, in a time of accelerating global changes, it is important to foster transfers from research to innovation and policy. This is all the more important for forest as the forest time – from seedlings to mature trees – is long.

A strong European research area on forest and forestry has developed since the early 2000s with successive ERA-NETs (WoodWisdom, Foresterra, SumForest, ForestValue), the Forest-based Sector Technology Platform (FTP) and the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI). A new impetus has been given with the new EU Forest Strategy in 2021 that has reinforced expectations towards forest research and innovation. The SCAR Strategic Working Group on Forests and Forestry Research and Innovation has a specific role to play in this process. Because it relies on a wider and more statutory country membership than ERA-NETs and

other programmes, the SCAR SWG FOREST can initiate research cooperation initiatives, follow the development of these initiatives, and review and disseminate their results. Being focused on research and innovation, it has a more focused assisting role than other forest-related EU bodies (like, e.g., the Standing Forestry Committee).

## SCAR SWG FOREST history

A SCAR Strategic Working Group on Forest Research and Innovation was established in October 2013 for two years in order to identify common needs for research and innovation suitable for transnational cooperation. The group should also address the diversity of management options depending on ownership as well as on environmental, social and economic conditions. It included 15 member states. ERA-Net SUMFOREST was launched during its mandate and a future ERA-Net cofund was also discussed.

A second mandate ran from end-2016 to mid-2019 with the aim to reinforce the group, to strengthen the knowledge base, to promote transnational cooperation in research and innovation in the forest-based sector, to provide intelligence into strategic programming, to feed public debates on forest-related EU policy areas, and to facilitate collaboration between researchers, practitioners and society. The group became the “Strategic Working Group on Forests and Forestry Research and Innovation”. During this second mandate, many activities have been carried out with the financial support of CASA (Coordination and Support Action) funded through Horizon 2020 to support and facilitate SCAR missions.

A third mandate started in July 2019 and ended in June 2023 with the objectives (1) to promote and strengthen transnational research and cooperation in the fields of climate change and other risks, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and bioeconomy to increase sustainability and competitiveness of the EU’s forest-based sector; (2) to promote forest-based system and value-chain approaches with consideration of other sectors and regions of the World; (3) to be a source of advice for a coherent and ambitious forest-based research and innovation area; (4) to provide advice on research and innovation to the implementation of forest-related national policies and EU forest strategy and related policies; and (5) to go on increasing the list of participating members and observers. During this third mandate, the group participated to the 5<sup>th</sup> SCAR Foresight Exercise, analysed knowledge gaps on topics linked to the new EU Forest Strategy (e.g. imported deforestation, carbon farming) in relation with other working groups (ARCH, BIOECONOMY), and contributed to the initial development of a European research and innovation partnership on forest and forestry.

The group currently includes 19 members and 6 observers.

## Objectives

The main objective of the SCAR SWG FOREST in its 4<sup>th</sup> mandate will be to support the development of a European research and innovation partnership on forests and forestry. The development of such a partnership is set as an objective in the new EU forest strategy “in order to strengthen EU cooperation” and “overcome the fragmentation of public research efforts in the EU”. Under the lead of DG AGRI and in relation with other DGs, the SCAR SWG FOREST has already contributed to the development of the initial fiche of the partnership entitled “Forests and Forestry for a Sustainable Future”, but much more effort will be needed to develop a full proposal for this partnership, and support its implementation (tentatively from 2025). In the development of this partnership, the SCAR SWG FOREST will collaborate and coordinate their work with the EUFORE project (<https://doi.org/10.3030/101081788>) in developing a European Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) on forestry and the forest-based sector.

Sub-objectives related to this main objective include:

- Identify knowledge gaps on topics of interest for the European partnership on forests and forestry;
- Support future studies on European forests and the forest sector;
- Map information systems and research infrastructures on forests;
- Monitor trends in emergent forest-related value chains related to the transition of economies.

While acting as a platform for the development of the European partnership on forest and forestry, the SCAR SWG FOREST will maintain its broader objective to provide advice on research and innovation to the implementation of forest-related national policies and EU forest strategy and related policies.

## Activities

The SCAR Strategic Working Group FOREST will meet on average four times a year, preferably in videoconferences. Physical meetings will be organised in connection with other SCAR or forest-related events. Each year, activities will be planned. A list of activities is given below for the first year:

1. Develop the proposal for the European research and innovation partnership “Forests and Forestry for a Sustainable Future” in relations with the DGs of the European Commission involved (AGRI, ENV, RTD, CLIMA, GROW, JRC) and following the guidelines for European partnerships under Horizon Europe;
2. Coordinate with the team of the EUFORE project for all project activities that may support the development of the European partnership on forests and

forestry, including the stakeholder assessment (task 3.1 of EUFORE), the interaction between stakeholders and the project team (task 3.3), the development of the SRIA and its research and innovation roadmap at EU-level (task 3.5), the stakeholder commitments towards the SRIA (task 3.6), and the liaison between policymakers and funding agencies (task 4.4).

3. Coordinate with the ForestValue2 Coordination and Support Action for the development of the European partnership on forests and forestry.
4. Follow-up on the portfolio analysis on carbon farming and carbon removal certification initiated in the previous mandate of the SCAR SWG FOREST with the support of the SCAR Framework Contract 2022-2023 so as to identify knowledge gaps on this topic.
5. Liaise with other SCAR groups (in particular the BIOECONOMY group) and liaise with the BIOEAST Initiative to identify synergies.
6. Review ongoing and new research and innovation projects on forest and the forest sector to identify relevant results to disseminate.

## Funding

Members of the SCAR Strategic Working Group FOREST normally take part in the group meetings at their own expenses. However, workshops and conferences may be funded by specific sources that will be sought by the group. If funds are found, specific studies will be launched in order to provide more information to the group.

## Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes of the SCAR Strategic Working Group FOREST include:

- Improved coordination between countries, research and innovation results, and finally better informed decision at the EU and MS levels
- Better efficiency and effectiveness of the research and innovation system, with less fragmentation and enhanced transnational programming
- Better consideration of the importance and complexity of forest issues in the scientific and policy arena, with a better recognition of the “forest” object being central to integrate connected issues (e.g. carbon, biodiversity, economy) and to structure European research
- Increased outreach on forest and forestry questions to a wider set of EU countries.

## Typical outputs

Typical outputs will be:

- Partnership proposal for the European research and innovation partnership on forests and forestry, in close collaboration with EUFORE
- Policy briefs

- Advices on ongoing processes
- Justified suggestions of areas requiring increased scientific attention.

## Governance

The SCAR Strategic Working Group FOREST includes 19 member states and 6 observers. Some developments in membership are still hoped. It is led by three Co-chairs appointed by the SCAR SG and managed by a small Core Group. Mika Kallio, Anne Tolvanen and Nicolas Picard have expressed willingness to co-chair SCAR SWG FOREST for the coming years.