

SCAR Strategic Working Group on Forests and Forestry Research and Innovation SWG FOREST

This document is written to be presented first to the Steering Group and then to the Plenary of the **Standing Committee on Agricultural Research** (SCAR), respectively in May and June 2019, aiming at obtaining approval for a three-year extension period of SCAR SWG FOREST from 01/07/2019 to 30/06/2022.

European forest and forestry background

Forests and other wooded land cover about **44% of the EU land area**, that means slightly more than agricultural land. They include a **wide variety of ecosystems** from the boreal zones of Scandinavia to the outermost regions of the tropics, including continental, oceanic and Mediterranean areas. They constitute an exceptional reservoir of **biodiversity**, an irreplaceable element of the **landscape**, a huge and increasing **stock of carbon, wood and non-wood resources**. They offer a **large set of ecosystem services** (Common international classification of ecosystem services – CICES) from regulation (climate, water, soil, air and biodiversity) and provisioning (nutrition, materials, energy and genetic material) to cultural amenities (human interactions with natural environment). Although the proportion of the territory they occupy worldwide is slightly lower (around 30%), forests have the same importance at the planet level.

Because of its overall weight and provision of numerous fundamental services, the forest-based sector is essential for societies worldwide and particularly in Europe. It is a primary component of **environmental and societal wellbeing**, and makes a significant contribution to **local and national economies, rural development and individual livelihood**. It must all the more be considered that it is subject to **various major and increasing risks and opportunities**: climate change, biodiversity conservation, illegal timber logging, deforestation, social expectations, development of bioeconomy and ICTs, etc. These changes have a particular resonance due to the **length of forest cycles** to which they add to challenge the **resilience and sustainable management of forests**. The development of **bioeconomy** finds with forestry a strong ally producing services and goods, among which wood, that is to say of a renewable, natural, and energy-efficient resource, with singular properties in terms of aesthetics, insulation, acoustics, resistance, chemical compounds ...

However, the forest-based sector is **highly fragmented** among multiple and often non-professional forest owners (on the resource side) and mainly SMEs (on the industry side). It is also torn between several forest-related public policies or strategies that are partially linked but often lacking connections between them: biodiversity, rural development, climate, energy and bioeconomy, sustainable development, forest and timber and, of course, research and innovation.

Rationale of forest and forestry research and innovation

Forest research got quickly a good comprehension of changes, risks and uncertainties which, however, question the way in which medium and long-term projections are constructed from past observations and experiments. In addition, the field of research is expanding and evolving towards **more interdisciplinarity to fully integrate change, risk and uncertainty management into decision support.**

Ecosystem services are now better analyzed than in the past when wood production was mainly under consideration. Nevertheless, **analyses on multiple and interacting ecosystem services should be better coordinated with more attention on synergies and trade-offs between them at different spatial scales.**

Bio-based activities showed a real ability to organize networks at the European level and their high potential for innovation. But much **more efforts are necessary to create and market new products** (be they goods or services), increase productivity, promote wood against other materials and energies, and add socioeconomic to technical considerations.

Overall, there is a long tradition of forest research and co-operation in Europe, with a development of diversified research capacities and publications in order to meet new challenges, as a consequence of partnerships that followed EC and MS supports under Framework Programmes, COST actions, ERA-Nets and EIPs, among others. But the complexity of the forest-based sector is such that science does not always address the needs of decision-makers and remains fragmented. **A strategy dedicated to research and innovation in the European forest-based sector is highly necessary in order to act its simultaneous and decisive contributions to major issues such as biodiversity, bioeconomy or resilience that cannot be treated separately. Such overall coherence is all the more needed as these issues are intensifying.**

SCAR SWG FOREST short 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 and to 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 new 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. The group includes 19 members, 3 observers.

Objectives

The SCAR Strategic Working Group FOREST aims at:

- promoting and strengthening **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;
- promoting forest-based **system and value-chain approaches with consideration of other sectors and regions of the World**;
- being a **source of advice** for a coherent and ambitious **forest-based research and innovation area**;
- providing **advice** on research and innovation **to the implementation of forest-related national policies and EU forest strategy and related policies**;
- going on **increasing the list of participating members and observers**.

Activities

The SCAR Strategic Working Group FOREST will meet on average twice a year, preferably in connection with other SCAR or forest-based event.

Each year, activities will be planned. A list of activities is given below, the two to three first ones being planned from the first year and the next ones to be planned later on in due time according the needs and the opportunities:

1. **Participation in the 5th SCAR foresight exercise** on “Natural resources and food systems: transitions towards a “safe and just” operating space”. The overall objective is to provide insights and recommendations to the European Commission, Member States and Associated Countries in the adoption of policies and a research agenda in the field of the Bioeconomy. Given the weight that food systems are likely to have in this foresight exercise, the publication of a summary adapted to the forest-based sector would be appropriate.
2. **Joint workshop to be planned on “imported deforestation”** with SCAR SWGs ARCH and FOOD SYSTEMS. The reduction in global forest area is annually about 5 million hectares in net terms and 10 million hectares in gross terms, essentially in tropical zone since forests are expanding in temperate zone; the main driver is commercial agriculture that is very often oriented toward exports; that means that consumers of developed countries, namely EU, have a significant responsibility on deforestation; until now, EU published a “Feasibility study on options to step up EU against deforestation”. Very soon, a European strategy could be elaborated.
3. **Development of guidance notes for prospective COST proposal writers**. COST actions have long been an excellent way of encouraging the incubation of ideas to be proposed later in calls for research projects. Since the reform of the system in 2015, there has been a significant drop in the number of proposed actions in the field of forestry and timber. It is envisaged that the SCAR FOREST group will reinvigorate this possibility by favoring the submission of draft actions.

4. **European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) AGRI and Raw Materials** have a role to play in the development of the European forest-based sector but seem to have been insufficiently used in that domain in comparison with agriculture or other raw materials than wood. SCAR SWG FOREST will discuss the possibilities to enhance the participation of the forest-based sector in EIPs.
5. **Follow up of the ERA-Net Cofund ForestValue** that selected 17 projects beginning in 2019 and ending in 2021-2022.
6. **Promotion of new public/public partnerships in the future**, in the frame of the 9th research and innovation research programme Horizon Europe.
7. **Joint activity with SCAR SWG Bioeconomy** in order to discuss what is bioeconomy for the forest-based sector
8. **Advice for the elaboration of the post-2020 EU forest strategy**. The EU forest strategy 2014-2020 was developed to provide a coherent framework for both EU forest-related policies and the national forestry policies of the individual EU countries. It aims at promoting the concept of sustainable forest management, that underpins the role of forests in serving several EU priorities, including rural development policy, environmental and climate policies, the provision of ecosystem services, provision of sustainable growth and jobs in rural areas.
9. **Promotion of important topics for research and innovation work programmes** and, for example, the following ones:
 - a. Long term monitoring that becomes increasingly important under climate and global changes (in connection with AEE, JRC, ENFIN, ICP Forest)
 - b. Joint management of adaptation to climate change and mitigation of climate change in the context of sustainable forest management
 - c. Interactions between ecosystem services from the supply side (ecological functions) and the demand side (with potential use conflicts)
 - d. Forest and tourism
 - e. Imported deforestation, after the workshop on the same subject
 - f. development of the use of digitization and automation, after the study conducted in the first half of 2019 on the subject.
 - g. System innovation in the forest-based sector

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
- Better consideration of the importance and complexity of forest issues in scientific and politic arena.

Typical outputs

Typical outputs will be:

- Policy briefs
- Guidance notes for researchers
- Advices on ongoing processes
- Justified suggestions of areas requiring increased scientific attention.

Governance

The SCAR Strategic Working Group FOREST included 19 member states and 3 observers. Some developments are still hoped.

It is led by a Core Group of 4 members representing a diversity of situations, presently France, Germany, Greece and Finland.

The Chair is Taneli KOLSTROM (taneli.kolstrom@luke.fi), Co-chair: Nicolas PICARD (nicolas.picard@gip-ecofor.org) (update March 2021)

Timeline

The SCAR Strategic Working Group FOREST received approval of the mandate by the SCAR Plenary, **from 1st July 2019 to 30 June 2022.**