

To all EOS Members

FOR INFORMATION – JRC Publication “Abrupt increase in harvested forest area over Europe after 2015”

Dear EOS Members,

Herewith, please find copy of the recent publication titled “**Abrupt increase in harvested forest area over Europe after 2015**” published by the specialised online magazine Nature and written by researchers of the European Commission's science and knowledge service (JRC). The publication claims that the total area of forests ‘clear-cut’ harvested in the EU in 2016-2018 was 49% higher than in 2011-2015, in terms of total biomass harvested (measured in tonnes per hectare), this equates to a 69% increase. Generally, the largest increase in harvested area during the period 2016-2019 occurred in needleleaf forest.

THE PROBLEM

Although the authors identify three possible drivers of the increase in harvested forest area, namely:

- the growing share of forests used for wood production which are reaching harvesting maturity;
- an increase in salvage logging following the rise in natural disturbances (pest, diseases and more extreme weather events caused by climate change);
- the recent expansion of the wood markets, indicated by econometric indicators on forestry, wood-based bioenergy and international trade.

the Study conclusions report that “**the increase in the rate of forest harvest is the result of the recent expansion of wood markets, as suggested by econometric indicators on forestry, wood-based bioenergy and international trade**. If such a high rate of forest harvest continues, the post-2020 EU vision of forest-based climate mitigation may be hampered, and the additional carbon losses from forests would require extra emission reductions in other sectors in order to reach climate neutrality by 2050”. The researchers report that “all economic indicators of wood demand and market (FAOSTAT, Eurostat and UNECE) confirm a substantial expansion of the forest sector during the last years. For example, the output of forestry

and connected secondary activities increased by 13% in 28 EU countries from 2012 to 2016. **This is possibly linked to new legislation (at both EU and country levels) promoting the use of wood in the context of the bioeconomy**, in particular in the use of renewable energy, which has been criticized for the potential impact on global forests.

Nevertheless, it is also reported that despite the recent increase, Europe's overall harvest rate is still slower than overall forest growth.

ONGOING ACTIONS:

- **EFI, the European Forest Institute, collected a group of scientists (including the Finnish research centre LUKE) and elaborated a comment on the article and sent it already to Nature for publication** as soon as possible. The scientists have carried out an alternative analysis, and note substantial shortcomings in the article. Neither the claimed changes nor their supposed causes can be supported. There are inconsistencies in the forest change time series and misattribution of natural disturbances effects due to harvesting. The abrupt changes in harvested area reported in the article are illusory. Even if the changes in tree cover were valid, the conclusion that “The increase in the rate of

forest harvest is the result of the recent expansion of wood markets' appears baseless".

- EOS contacted Dr Giacomo Grassi (JRC, writer) in order to express concerns about the Study conclusions and provide data on the development of the bark beetle and forest disturbances. These impacts should be taken into account and can't be neglected in the Study conclusions.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Regretfully, as you may have seen, the headline of the study has been taken up by quite a number of journals (*which avoided to mention that Europe's overall harvest rate is still slower than overall forest growth*) and it is very difficult to foresee an EU action aiming at reversing these conclusions in the public discourse and perceptions. Overall, the forestry sector is facing an increasing concern about what can be considered a sustainable used of timber resources.

At the same time, it is important to emphasise that that bioenergy production from forests biomass is heavily criticized by the EU policy makers, particularly at EU Parliament level. Moreover, very recently, Mr Alfonso Gutierrez-Teira, Head of Sector for Forestry, DG AGRI, European Commission stated that the EU Commission is concerned about the increase demand on forestry biomass. Alongside, the word "bioeconomy" and "bioenergy" are often -and mistakenly - considered as synonyms.

Thankful for your kind attention.

With my best regards,

Silvia Melegari

Silvia Melegari

Secretary General



European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry

Rue Montoyer 24/box 20

BE-1000 Brussels

TP: +32 (0) 2 287 08 68 - Mobile: +32 (0) 492 69 79 98

E-mail: silvia.melegari@eos-oes.eu

Internet: www.eos-oes.eu

