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OPINION

of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

on the European Forest Strategy - The Way Forward
(2019/2157(INI))

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety calls on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- having regard to the report on stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests, which is currently being discussed in the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety,
- A. whereas forests and other wooded land have grown substantially in the EU between 1990 and 2015 as a result of targeted programmes and natural growth, covering 43 % of the EU's territory, equivalent to 182 million hectares, and accounting for 5 % of the world's total forests; whereas forest areas make up half of the Natura 2000 network; whereas some Member States, with more than half of their territories covered by forests, are dependent on forestry; whereas 60 % of forests in the EU are privately owned, mostly by small-scale owners with less than 3 hectares of forest; whereas forests host a significant part of Europe's terrestrial biodiversity;
- B. whereas the EU has committed to the Aichi Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity, such as target 7 requiring that by 2020 areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, thus ensuring conservation of biodiversity, but the EU is not set to achieve these targets;
- C. whereas forests are circular ecosystems founded on full recycling of matter and nutrients within; whereas any form of active management is based on exploitation of resources from this ecosystem, which inevitably and negatively affects its functioning, structure and biodiversity;
- D. whereas many aspects of forests and forestry are regulated under EU legislation such as the Birds and Habitats Directives, the common agricultural policy (CAP), the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation, the Renewable Energy Directive and the Timber Regulation;
- E. whereas, according to the European Environment Agency's report on 'The European Environment – state and outlook 2020', long-term trends in bird populations, including common forest birds, demonstrate that Europe has experienced a massive decline in biodiversity, with intensive forest management being identified as one of the drivers¹; whereas, according to the same report, Europe is facing environmental challenges of an unprecedented scale and urgency; whereas urgent action is needed over the next 10 years to address the alarming rate of biodiversity loss, the increasing impacts of climate change and the overconsumption of natural resources;
- F. whereas, unlike younger, managed forests, large trees and intact, older forests provide essential habitat and are essential stocks of carbon that cannot be replaced for at least 100-150 years if harvested; whereas old forests continue to remove and store carbon from the atmosphere, including through forest soil; whereas primary forests have almost

¹ European Environment Agency report on 'The European Environment – state and outlook 2020', page 83.

disappeared in the EU;

- G. whereas the Commission's 2018 report on progress in the implementation of the current EU forest strategy states that the implementation of the EU biodiversity policy remains a major challenge and that 'reports on conservation of forest habitats and species show no improvement so far'; whereas, for the period 2007-2012, Member States reported that only 26 % of forest species and 15 % of forest habitats of European interest, as listed in the Habitats Directive, were in 'favourable conservation status'; whereas the quality of forests in the EU has been declining for a long time; whereas illegal logging is still unresolved in some Member States;
- H. whereas, in accordance with Article 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the environment is a shared competence between the Union and its Member States; whereas Article 191 of the TFEU provides that EU policy on the environment shall, *inter alia*, aim for a high level of protection; whereas the Court of Justice has ruled that forests are part of the EU's natural heritage and are thus covered by Article 191²;
- I. whereas Parliament declared a climate and environment emergency on 28 November 2019;
- J. whereas forests are an integral part of sustainable development; whereas in order to help tackle biodiversity loss and climate crises, it is essential that forests are protected, restored and managed in such a way as to maximise their capacity for carbon storage and biodiversity protection; whereas intact ecosystems have greater capability than degraded ones to overcome environmental stressors, including changes to climate, as they have inherent properties that enable them to maximise their adaptive capacity; whereas, unlike younger and managed forests, large trees and intact, older forests provide essential habitat and more carbon dioxide (CO₂) storage; whereas interconnected forest habitats and forest corridors are key to securing the survival of endangered flora and fauna;
- K. whereas forests and forest areas have a multifunctional role as they are circular ecosystems, founded on full recycling of matter and nutrients, and are crucial for regulating the water cycle, including as water retention to prevent flooding, absorbing CO₂, storing carbon, hosting terrestrial biodiversity, and providing close-to-nature recreation and well-being possibilities, as well as contributing to economic growth and employment in rural and urban areas, where the EU forestry sector is an important pillar employing more than 3 million people; whereas these jobs are dependent on resilient forest ecosystems in the long term;
- L. whereas the EU has committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including goal 15, which is to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss;

² Judgment of the Court (Fifth Chamber) of 25 February 1999 in joined cases C-164/97 and C-165/97, *European Parliament v Council of the European Union*, ECLI:EU:C:1999:99, paragraph 16.

- M. whereas forests contribute effectively to territorial balance, economic growth and employment in rural and urban areas, and help maintain the competitiveness of the forestry sector; whereas a balanced approach to all forest functions is key to ensuring consistency between forest-related policies; whereas it is important to underline the continuous efforts undertaken by forest owners and managers to ensure sustainable forest development, and the importance of further enhancing their potential to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal and the development of the bio-economy while guaranteeing ecosystem services and biodiversity; whereas EU forest owners and managers have a long tradition of and experience in managing multifunctional forests; whereas, however, owing to current challenges, a good knowledge of forest ecology is required, including in tackling natural disturbances;
- N. whereas global demand for authentic wild nature is growing, and public support for strict protection of forest ecosystems has increased significantly;
- O. whereas genetic variety in forests is essential for adapting to changing environmental conditions such as climate change and for restoring biodiversity;
- P. whereas the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Land Use finds that commercial forestry has contributed to increasing net greenhouse gas emissions, loss of natural ecosystems, and declining biodiversity;
- Q. whereas Europe's forests are of immense value in terms of climate mitigation, since forest ecosystems absorb and store around 10 % of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions, and there is potential to increase that capacity; whereas forests also provide a renewable and climate-friendly raw material that acts as a substitute for energy-intensive materials and fossil fuels; whereas, however, the principle of 'cascading' should be recognised and used as a beneficial way of improving resource efficiency in the new forest strategy; whereas forests store and absorb about 2.5 times more CO₂ in soils than in tree biomass; and whereas forests disturbed by fires and logging have seen soil loss as high as 26.6 %; highlights therefore the importance of complex forest ecosystems and of mature forests;
- R. whereas 'proforestation' is the practice of letting forests grow to their maximum ecological capacity to store carbon and reach their full biodiversity potential;
- S. whereas, in order to preserve the full scale of forest biodiversity and functionality and respect the need for mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, with the LULUCF Regulation recognising that a carbon pool of deadwood in the forest is analogous to long-lived harvested wood products, as its carbon does not undergo instantaneous oxidisation and provides crucial microhabitats on which a number of species, including protected ones, are dependent, it is crucially important to protect a proportion of forest areas from any form of active human intervention; whereas new climate change adaptation and mitigation options have arisen, including proforestation³ and close-to-nature forestry;

³ 'Proforestation: growing existing forests intact to their ecological potential', as in William R. Moomaw, '2019: Intact Forests in the United States: Proforestation Mitigates Climate Change and Serves the Greatest Good', in *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*.

- T. whereas, according to the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of 2019, nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history and 1 million animal and plant species are at risk of extinction;
- U. whereas the CAP is the main source of EU funds for forest management;
- V. whereas plantations are often monocultures, which contain less biodiversity than natural and semi-natural forests, and are less resilient to climate change, thus leading to more carbon losses due to natural disturbances;
- W. whereas different types of cutting have different impacts on forests' carbon dioxide storage capacities, soil quality and conservation status; whereas clear-cutting of large areas is the most damaging method, since it removes much of the organic matter and roots from the soil, causes the release of carbon stored in the soil (which is around 2.5 times as much as that stored in tree biomass) and significantly damages the complex structure of the forest and its dependent ecosystems;
- X. whereas bioenergy subsidies lead to worsening of the ratio of wood use between material and energy use, and at the same time to an artificial increase in the supply of biomass⁴, thus lowering the capacity of forests to sequester carbon;
- Y. whereas subsidies for various renewable energy sources help kickstart the sector; whereas the solar and wind energy sectors and related technologies can sustain themselves without subsidies after initial scaling up; whereas, however, this is not true for bioenergy, which is a sector that runs only thanks to subsidies;
- Z. whereas data available on forests at EU level is incomplete and of varying quality, which hampers EU and Member State coordination of forest management and conservation;
- AA. whereas rampant deforestation is one of the factors that have created a 'perfect storm' for the spillover of diseases from wildlife to people⁵;
- AB. whereas the EU has a responsibility to ensure that our consumption patterns and imports from third countries do not contribute to deforestation or forest degradation, nor to the conversion or degradation of other natural ecosystems, in other parts of the world;
- 1. Welcomes the Commission's decision to introduce a new forest strategy; stresses the need for the forest strategy to observe the principle of subsidiarity; stresses the need for the forest strategy to recognise the EU's competences in the area of protection of the environment, including forests; recalls that, under Article 191 of the TFEU, EU policy on the environment must contribute, among other objectives, to the pursuit of preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment and to prudent and

⁴ Joint Research Centre of the European Commission report of 2018 entitled 'Biomass production, supply, uses and flows in the European Union': 'Indeed, targets for renewable energy set by the EU have resulted in a surge in the consumption of woody biomass.' Estimates for energy use of wood: 42 % (2005), 43 % (2010), 48 % currently, while energy uses are likely underreported.

⁵ IPBES Expert Guest Article entitled 'COVID-19 Stimulus Measures Must Save Lives, Protect Livelihoods, and Safeguard Nature to Reduce the Risk of Future Pandemics', by Professors Josef Settele, Sandra Diaz and Eduardo Brondizio and Dr Peter Daszak, 27 April 2020.

rational utilisation of natural resources; recalls that several pieces of EU legislation affect forests and forest management; emphasises, in this regard, the need for a holistic and consistent forest strategy that enhances the multifunctional role of forests and the forest-based sector in the EU and that promotes the far-reaching societal, economic and environmental benefits of forests with full respect for the EU's climate and environmental objectives; emphasises the need for clear prioritisation with climate and biodiversity protection as central and interconnected objectives in the new EU forest strategy; underlines the urgent need to prevent and manage natural disturbances; highlights that the forest strategy should be consistent with the European Green Deal and aligned with the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy;

2. Observes that, according to the European Environment Agency, urban woods also make a by no means insignificant contribution to combating climate change and its impact on health, and draws attention to their particularly vital function for town- and city-dwellers as places of recreation and as natural surroundings; stresses that, in addition to woods in rural areas, urban woodlands and the interaction of woods and trees with urban and periurban areas, as well as understanding of their function for these communities, should be evaluated, particularly with reference to the persistent droughts;
3. Emphasises the need for a holistic and consistent forest strategy that enhances the multifunctional role and sustainability of forests and the forest-based sector in the EU and promotes the far-reaching environmental, societal, economic and cultural benefits of forests; emphasises, in that connection, that urgent action needs to be taken as a priority to prevent and manage the natural challenges and existing pressures that forests face, and to tackle deforestation;
4. Underlines that the new forest strategy should serve as a central policy instrument in the EU for efficient coordination of forest-related policies and initiatives as part of the European Green Deal; calls on the Commission and the Member States to consider introducing targets for forest cover with a view to sustainably increasing current levels while endorsing the 2030 targets on protected areas, including forests, and restoration in line with the EU's biodiversity strategy and Parliament's calls⁶ for curbing deforestation and improving the quality of existing forests and woodland; considers that the forest strategy should include adequate instruments to reach these goals;
5. Stresses that forests make up almost half of the total surface area of Natura 2000 sites (i.e. 37.5 million hectares) and that 23 % of all forests in Europe are within these sites, for which forests are of crucial importance⁷; in this context, underlines the urgent need to honour the Commission's pledge to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to non-compliance with environmental legislation and in particular to prioritise effective enforcement of EU nature legislation, including adequate management plans for Natura 2000 sites, and to assess whether sufficient funds have been provided for the protection of forests in Natura 2000 sites, including through the pursuit of infringements procedures; points out, in that connection, that there are five major challenges when it comes to the implementation of Natura 2000 in forests:

⁶ European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0015.

⁷ European Environment Agency, 'European Forest Ecosystems – State and Trends', 2016.

- (1) the balance between conserving biodiversity and timber production,
- (2) integrating conservation and the requirements of local stakeholders,
- (3) climate change,
- (4) the lack of funding, and
- (5) conflict with other sectoral policies;

with that in mind, calls on the Commission and the Member States:

- (1) to improve communication and transparency,
 - (2) to place more emphasis on the science behind conservation when drawing up management strategies and in responding to climate change,
 - (3) to involve the general public more in formulating and implementing policy,
 - (4) to put in place an effective funding strategy,
 - (5) to establish an integrated European land-use and conservation policy, and
 - (6) to improve knowledge about the implementation of Natura 2000 in forests, and about the effects of Natura 2000 on biodiversity, forest management and other uses of land throughout the EU;
6. Notes that safeguarding and sustainably managing our forests makes a core contribution to our general well-being and should not be subject to competition law; recalls that forests are a home for public-interest activities in the field of leisure and health, as well as education;
 7. Observes that, with reference to the multifunctional role of forests, all aspects need to be promoted: the protective function of forests as a habitat for countless animal and plant species, the utility function of forests as sources of wood and other products, and the protective function of forests for flora and fauna; stresses that the ecological, economic and social functions of forests must be considered in conjunction with one another;
 8. Take the view that it is of the utmost importance that access to EU support for forests be simplified and red tape cut, taking into account the difficulties faced by small and medium-sized land owners and even by some public entities;
 9. Stresses that there are diverging views on the CO₂ absorption capacities of different kinds of forests, and that scientific research indicates that resilient, healthy and biodiverse forests absorb more CO₂ than intensively harvested forests; urges, therefore, that the new forest strategy should promote sustainable forest management; recalls that the EU and its Member States have committed to apply the definition and principles of sustainable forest management (SFM)⁸; notes, however, that the Commission is developing an EU-level definition of sustainable forest management, which should be based on the highest sustainability standards, with protection of biodiversity and valuable carbon sinks as central elements; highlights the overall climate benefits stemming from forests and the forest-based value chain, namely improved CO₂ sequestration, carbon storage and sustainable substitution of fossil-based raw materials

⁸ Provided in Forest Europe Helsinki Resolution H1 of 1993.

and energy; recognises that sustainable forest management must ensure the protection of European forest biodiversity; notes that forest protection and production do not necessarily act in contradiction, but could in some cases be compatible with one another and have a positive result in terms of climate protection;

10. Stresses that under some circumstances there are trade-offs between protecting the climate and protecting biodiversity in the bio-economy sector, and particularly in forestry, which plays a central role in the transition towards a climate-neutral economy; expresses its concern that this trade-off has not been sufficiently addressed in recent policy discussions; calls on all stakeholders to develop a coherent approach to bring together biodiversity protection and climate protection in a thriving forest-based sector and bio-economy;
11. Notes that although best-preserved forests, from which no products are extracted, are few, they should be given the attention they deserve, as they make a contribution to knowledge, health and ecotourism that we cannot deny to future generations; stresses that Natura 2000, as the European ecological habitat conservation network, should play a crucial role in the European forest strategy; is of the opinion that Natura 2000 should be key in guaranteeing the protection and conservation of forests;
12. Stresses the importance and the vital role of the forestry and wood clusters for the protection of the climate; stresses that forestry and forestry services, as well as downstream processing operations, generate substantial economic activity, particularly in rural, structurally disadvantaged regions, thanks to their demand for further goods and services from other sectors;
13. Stresses the need for Member States to share good practices with regard to forest management and planning; also draws attention to the importance of establishing European guidelines, linked to the pre-established objectives in the European Green Deal, with a view to providing the Member States with guidance on forestry management, maintenance and planning;
14. Stresses that protection and proforestation, as well as reforestation and afforestation with location and environment appropriate tree species, should be the focus of the future EU forestry strategy; notes that close-to-nature management practices are the best able to achieve these goals;
15. Stresses that according to research⁹ old-growth forests continue to accumulate carbon, contrary to the view that they are carbon neutral or even sources of CO₂;
16. Stresses that no substitution effect of forest-based products can compensate for the loss of old-growth and primary forests, which are recognised as irreplaceable¹⁰ and should be protected through legal and incentivising instruments targeting their complexity, connectivity and representativeness¹¹;

⁹ S. Luyssaert et al., 2008: 'Old-growth forests as global carbon sinks'. In *Nature*.

¹⁰ Commission communication of 23 July 2019 entitled 'Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests' (COM(2019)0352).

¹¹ European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0015), the exact reading of paragraph

17. Calls for strict protection of the EU's primary and old-growth forests as part of the EU forest strategy;
18. Recalls that about 60 % of the EU's forests are privately owned and that about two-thirds of private forest owners own less than 3 hectares of forest; stresses that all measures must duly take this into account and hence must be designed in a way that they are accessible to and can be practically implemented by small-scale forest owners; recalls that the Commission has identified administrative burden and forest ownership structure as limiting factors for the uptake of certain measures¹²;
19. Reiterates the fact that conservation of high-carbon ecosystems, including forests, represents a response option with an immediate impact on climate change, unlike afforestation, reforestation and restoration, which take more time to deliver¹³; calls for policy actions in the EU to be guided by this principle;
20. Stresses that the continuing decline in biodiversity has had negative consequences for the delivery of many ecosystem services over the last few decades; notes that these declines have occurred in part because of intensive agriculture and forestry practices; underlines that the continuing decline in regulating services can have detrimental consequences for quality of life¹⁴;
21. Recognises that climate change is altering the growth capacity of forests, and increasing the frequency and seriousness of drought, floods, and fires, as well as fostering the development of new pests and diseases which affect forests; notes that intact ecosystems have greater capability than degraded ones to overcome environmental stressors, including changes to climate, as they have inherent properties that enable them to maximise their adaptive capacity;
22. Calls for Member States to ensure that forests above 10 hectares have forest management plans comprising carbon storage and biodiversity considerations and, where applicable, comply with Natura 2000 objectives;
23. Recalls the letter from more than 700 scientists calling for a scientifically sound revision of the Renewable Energy Directive, in particular excluding certain types of woody biomass from counting towards the target and removing its eligibility for support;
24. Highlights that large-scale intensive bioenergy plantations, including monocultures, and especially those replacing natural forests and subsistence farmland, have negative

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¹² Commission report of 7 December 2018 entitled 'Progress in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy – A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest sector' (COM(2018)0811), p.3.

¹³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2019: 'Climate Change and Land Report-Summary for Policymakers'.

¹⁴ Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) (2018): Summary for policymakers of the regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Europe and Central Asia of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. M. Fischer, M. Rounsevell, A. Torre-Marín Rando, A. Mader, A. Church, M. Elbakidze, V. Elias, T. Hahn. P.A. Harrison, J. Hauck, B. Martín-López, I. Ring, C. Sandström, I. Sousa Pinto, P. Visconti, N.E. Zimmermann and M. Christie (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

impacts on biodiversity;

25. Emphasises the role forests can play in substituting fossil-based materials with bio-based products; believes that the new forest strategy should reflect the importance of the role played by European forests and the EU's circular sustainable bio-economy in reaching climate neutrality by 2050 and that measures to this end should be included; stresses that these measures should make use of the full potential of substitution-effects; stresses, however, that measures in the new forest strategy concerning the bio-economy and use of wood biomass should duly take into account their crucial role in carbon storage, biodiversity protection and the provision of other ecosystem services and the impacts on the conservation of forest ecosystems and on CO₂ sequestration in a resource efficient manner;
26. Points out that in the report on progress in the implementation of the EU forest strategy, it is noted that despite the action taken so far, the implementation of the EU biodiversity policy remains a major challenge¹⁵, and that the reports on the conservation of forest habitats and species show little improvement so far; calls on the Commission to integrate in the new forest strategy as a key component the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems and biodiversity;
27. Notes with concern that 15 % of forest habitats and 26 % of forest species were found to be in favourable conservation status in 2015¹⁶; recalls target 3b of the EU biodiversity strategy, which seeks to bring about a measurable improvement in the conservation status of species and habitats that depend on, or are affected by, forestry and in the provision of related ecosystem services; deplores the fact that, according to the mid-term review of the biodiversity strategy, no significant progress towards the target has been made¹⁷;
28. Stresses the need to reduce the EU's consumption in general, and also of wood and wood-based products, by promoting a more circular economy and prioritising the most efficient use of wood, which allows for the locking-in of carbon over the long-term and minimises the generation of waste;
29. Takes the view that the EU's forest strategy should help to reverse the trend of native species increasingly being overlooked in favour of fast-growing alien species, such as the eucalyptus;
30. Emphasises the importance of vocational training and retraining programmes for forestry specialists in the use of new technologies and their adaptation to ongoing change, including the creation of a communication platform for the exchange of good practices, and considers it important to involve forest owners and managers in this process and to encourage them to follow sustainable forest conservation and biodiversity promotion practices;

¹⁵ Commission report of 7 December 2018 entitled 'Progress in the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy – A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest sector' (COM(2018)0811), p.3.

¹⁶ European Environment Agency briefing of 27 November 2019, 'Forest dynamics in Europe and their ecological consequences'. Last modified on 10 December 2019.

¹⁷ Commission report of 2 October 2015 entitled 'The mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020' (COM(2015)0478).

31. Calls for the new forest strategy to help ensure that forest management practices avoid any fragmentation of forest ecosystems into smaller parts, with a particular focus on primary forests, since many species, including larger mammals, rely on interconnected, intact forest habitats for survival; calls for the forest strategy to prioritise the re-connection of already fragmented forests through the restoration of forest corridors appropriate to local conditions and biodiversity;
32. Takes the view that information on forest resources and forests' condition is essential to ensuring that decisions taken on forests are as socio-economically and ecologically beneficial as possible, at all levels;
33. Stresses the particular importance of the Carpathian region and notes that EU accession to the Carpathian convention would help provide support to the region, which holds irreplaceable natural values in continental Europe;
34. Notes with concern that, at EU level, reported data¹⁸ indicate that energy accounts for 48 % of total use of woody biomass; reiterates that next to natural carbon sequestration and biodiversity protection *in situ*, to be coherent with our biodiversity and climate goals, use of harvested wood should be leaning towards material use;
35. Highlights the value and the potential of newly established and traditional extensive agroforestry systems for agricultural production, diversification, including for the purpose of the bioeconomy, carbon sequestration, prevention of desertification, and potential to decrease pressure on forest ecosystems; regrets that the rules stemming from the reforms of the CAP have systematically led to the degradation of agroforestry systems and in many cases have hampered their restoration, regeneration and rejuvenation; notes with concern the current large-scale die-off of iconic Mediterranean high-nature value agroforestry systems and urgently calls for changes to the rules in order to facilitate the regeneration and restoration of existing agroforestry systems, and the establishment of new ones;
36. Notes that research and technology have come a long way since the forest strategy was introduced in 2013; stresses the importance of encouraging further research into, *inter alia*, forest ecosystems, biodiversity, sustainable substitution of fossil-based raw materials and energies, carbon storage, wood-based products, and sustainable forest management practices, in forestry and bio-based products; believes that EU funds for research should be further directed towards this; calls on the Commission and the Member States to also fund research and continue to gather data on innovative methods of protecting and building the resilience of forests such as introducing resilient species; stresses that more research and funding would make a positive contribution to climate change mitigation, safeguarding forest ecosystems, and boosting biodiversity, sustainable economic growth, and employment, especially in rural areas;
37. Calls for the introduction of a coordinated electronic timber track and trace system and for support for the development of automated tools for timber circulation analysis and monitoring at all stages of its transformation and integration with related government and commercial record keeping, reporting, permits issuance, and agreements

¹⁸ Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, 2018: 'Biomass production, supply, uses and flows in the European Union'.

registration systems;

38. Emphasises that local and regional authorities have a key role to play in ensuring the long-term sustainability of forests, as they could play a part in regional-level sustainable development plans, the development of long-life-cycle carbon-absorbing forestry products and the promotion of SME entrepreneurial spirit in the forestry sector;
39. Calls for continued funding for research in soils and their role in forests climate change resilience and adaptation, biodiversity protection and enhancement, as well as the provision of other ecosystem services;
40. Considers it essential to preserve endemic genetic resources and select those elements of the existing gene pool that are best adapted to expected growing conditions in the future;
41. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to create economic and policy instruments that will allow more forest to grow to their ecological potential and absorb carbon dioxide;
42. Stresses the importance of the existence of scientific evidence with regard to the EU's forestry policies;
43. Proposes updating the rules on reporting and accounting for LULUCF in order to incentivise choice of non-intervention in the accounting category of managed forest land in areas of old-growth forests, for example by excluding respective removals from the limitations posed by the regulation;
44. Stresses the importance of other forest-related activities, specifically the harvesting of non-wood forest products, such as mushrooms and soft fruit, along with grazing and beekeeping;
45. Considers that strictly protected areas in non-intervention management regimes should be part of the EU forest strategy and of local development strategies based on low impact natural tourism and provisioning of non-productive ecosystem services;
46. Calls for the Commission to uphold the principle of 'do no harm' laid down in the Green Deal communication (COM(2019)0640) and to revise all relevant legislation to reflect the latest science in relation to forest ecosystems, different carbon pools and their true value for climate change mitigation and adaptation, including the crucial role of their biodiversity in this adaptation;
47. Recalls the need to protect forests from growing threats and to reconcile their productive and protective functions, taking into account that drought, fires, storms and pests are expected to damage forests more frequently and more severely as a result of climate change;
48. Expresses its concern over the health and resilience of forests in many parts of Europe; underlines that the new forest strategy should take into account that a diverse forest, reflecting the composition that is natural to the region, is generally more resilient than a mono-culture forest; highlights the need to strengthen and make full use of EU

mechanisms to tackle the transboundary pressures on forests; recalls that according to the EEA¹⁹ the main sources of pressure on forests in the EU are increased land use, expanding urban areas and climate change; emphasises that these ecosystems are increasingly prone to natural disturbances such as storms, fires, droughts, invasive species, pests, insect infestation and diseases, all amplifying vulnerability to climate change; calls on the Commission to facilitate a platform for exchange of best practices to combat this;

49. Points out that air pollution has a significant impact not only on human health but also on the environment; invites the Commission to explore the impacts of air pollution on forests and forest biodiversity in its upcoming zero-pollution action plan;
50. Welcomes the launch in February 2020 of the Forest Information System for Europe (FISE), which provides European data infrastructure in the area of forests; calls on the Member States to fully engage in sharing data and working towards a harmonised data framework on the state of forests in Europe; calls on the work of the FISE to be completed in a timely manner on all five priority themes: forest basic data, bio-economy, nature and biodiversity, climate change mitigation, and forest health and resilience;
51. Stresses that the EU forest strategy should have as one of its objectives achieving a substantial increase in the proportion of forest species and habitats in favourable conservation status; calls on the strategy to include ambitious measures to this effect;
52. Recognises that the EU forest strategy should take into consideration the high economic, social and cultural value of forests; points out that different economic activities related to forests can have varying disruptive effects on forest ecosystems; stresses that the new EU forest strategy should encourage only that kind of economic activity that respects sustainable boundaries of forest ecosystems;
53. Strongly encourages the limiting of the harvesting method of clear cutting and advocates increasing the use of continuous growing; recognises that clear cutting of a forest releases the majority of the residual carbon stock from the ground of the area into the atmosphere; stresses the need to promote alternative and less invasive methods of harvesting wood;
54. Welcomes the fact that, as announced in the European Green Deal, the new forest strategy will have as its key objectives effective afforestation, forest preservation and restoration; highlights that the carbon capture potential of forest ecosystems continues to increase into the maturity of the forest ecosystem and that natural forests offer important benefits; stresses that priority should be given to the protection and restoration of existing forests, in particular old-growth forests;
55. Stresses the need for the EU to do more to stop clear-cutting and illegal logging practices; notes that, despite the EU Timber Regulation, illegal logging still takes place in some Member States; urges the Commission and the Member States to take urgent action on these issues through close monitoring and through the enforcement of existing

¹⁹ European Environment Agency, 'Forest dynamics in Europe and their ecological consequences', 27 November 2018.

EU laws and calls on the Commission to swiftly pursue infringement procedures when breaches occur as well as to follow through on illegal logging cases through organisms such as the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF); calls on the Commission to finalise, without delay, the fitness check of EU rules against illegal logging;

56. Recalls that most of the EU's forests are managed²⁰, including the majority of old-growth forests; stresses that an EU forest strategy with a long-term planning is needed to improve the proportion of old-growth forests; invites the Commission to propose a long-term EU forest strategy for the improvement of the proportion of old-growth forest;
57. Calls on the Commission to explore the potential of developing a legislative framework on an EU certification scheme for locally produced wood that is based on the highest sustainability standards;
58. Points out that there is scope for improvement in the uptake of rural development funds by Member States, especially in the programmes related to improving forest biodiversity; calls on the Member States to use the available support measures for the conservation of forests and biodiversity; highlights also the importance of ensuring sufficient resources for the implementation of the new EU forest strategy;
59. Calls on the Commission to restart the negotiations for an international legally binding forest convention, which would contribute to the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests and would provide for their multiple and complementary functions and uses, including action towards reforestation, afforestation and forest conservation, while taking into account social, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual needs of present and future generations, and recognising the vital role of all types of forests in maintaining the ecological processes and balance, and supporting the identity, culture and rights of indigenous people, their communities and other communities and forest dwellers;
60. Expresses its concern about the biodiversity loss occurring in the EU, which is something that needs to be stopped by the EU forest strategy; recalls that the loss of biodiversity is an internal problem for the EU; notes that the strategy should protect the last fragments of mature forests in the EU owing to their importance as biodiversity reservoirs and as a way to increase forest resilience; emphasises that the strategy should promote a zero-impact silviculture on soil and landscapes;
61. Notes that, despite the establishment of the Forest Information System for Europe, the available data on forests in the EU, and in particular on their ecological status, is incomplete, difficult to aggregate and not backed by remote sensing; calls for significant investment by the Commission and the Member States in the further development of the Forest Information System for Europe and the implementation of a Pan-European remote sensing programme;
62. Notes that accomplishing a unified information system on EU forests has been a long-

²⁰ Naudts, K., Chen, Y., et al., 'Europe's forest management did not mitigate climate warming'. In Science, 5 February 2016: Vol. 351, Issue 6273, pp. 597-600.

lasting and not fully achieved endeavour up to now; stresses that in order to address present data gaps, synergies must be sought between authorities and relevant organisations, going beyond project-bound limitations – this includes data availability, harmonised methodologies and supporting financial and capacity resources;

63. Emphasises that the new forest strategy should, at both EU and Member State level, incentivise growth in the circular bio-economy and acknowledge that forest-based value chains are key in achieving this growth; considers that it should also encourage a widening of the circular bio-economy through further integration between forest-based value chains and other sectors and value chains that need to decarbonise;
64. Notes that 90 % of EU funding for forests comes from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD); is concerned about the envisaged cuts to the budget of the EAFRD; calls on decision-makers to avoid, if possible, any cuts to the support for the forest sector in order to comply with the objectives under the European Green Deal;
65. Calls on the Commission to include in the new EU forest strategy binding targets for the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems, especially native European forests, in order to increase the EU's international credibility in this area, among other objectives, and recommends supporting Member States in protecting native European forests;
66. Highlights the role of forests in increasing resilience towards adverse impacts from climate change; points to the need for concrete and effective actions in climate adaptation strategies and plans, incorporating the synergies between mitigation and adaptation;
67. Calls on the Commission to address the issue of urban forest development in the EU forest strategy; welcomes in this context the fact that many urban centres in Europe have signed up to the Tree Cities of the World programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); calls on the Commission to promote cooperation and the exchange of best practices among European towns and cities on the subject of boosting urban forestry;
68. Expresses deep concern that in parts of the EU there is a lack of implementation of existing forestry-related EU legislation; calls on the Commission and the Member States to fully implement existing legislation and strengthen the implementation of sustainable and active forest management;
69. Notes that the implementation of adapted forest management plans takes place at Member State level and requires increased cooperation between forest and environmental authorities, NGOs, local communities and forest owners;
70. Calls on the Member States to ensure that the National Strategic Plans under the CAP will incentivise forest managers to preserve, grow and manage forests sustainably;
71. Draws attention to the need to develop and introduce plans to tackle invasive species, equipped with specific human, technical and financial resources for that purpose;
72. Calls for trade agreements to take account of the principle of sustainability with regard to timber imports, and for penalties to be applied in the event of infringements;

73. Notes that multi-age, multi-species forests which are managed according to biodiversity protection criteria are more resilient to climate impacts such as fires, droughts, and unseasonal weather events, and as such are an important investment for the future, not only for communities and nature, but also for forest economies; insists that monocultures, which are less resilient to pests and diseases, as well as to droughts, wind, storms and fires, should not be supported by EU funds;
74. Stresses that it is only by encompassing the entire forest-based value chains that the new forest strategy can achieve policy impact; notes that forest-based value chains already play a vital role today for the European economy and will be essential in building a green-growth strategy through the European Green Deal; stresses that a new forest strategy must support competitive and sustainable EU forest-based value chains domestically as well as globally;
75. Emphasises the therapeutic function of forests, which have direct positive consequences for human health and people's quality of life; stresses that forests also contribute to the socio-economic development of Europe's rural territories, including the distribution of income to the most depopulated areas in the EU thanks to ecotourism, which is one of the most popular modalities within the tourism industry;
76. Reiterates its call²¹ for consistent forest-related policies which combat biodiversity loss and climate-change impacts, and which lead to an increase in the EU's natural sinks while protecting, conserving and enhancing biodiversity;
77. Calls on the Commission to include the need for support to forest owners, including financial support, in the new EU forest strategy; considers that such support should be made subject to the application of sustainable forest management; notes that, in order to ensure continued investment in modern technologies, in environmental and climate measures that reinforce the multifunctional role played by forests, with a specific financial instrument for the management of areas in the Natura 2000 network, and in creating decent working conditions, this financial support should be the result of a robust combination of financial instruments, national funding and private-sector financing; calls on the Commission to establish and finance a European Afforestation and Reforestation Programme using global navigation satellite system (GNSS) information, dedicated to increasing forest area, tackling land degradation, increasing air quality in urban areas and ensuring that forests retain their composition of natural species;
78. Regrets that the current usage of forest management plans has varied considerably among the Member States; urges the Commission therefore to strengthen the use of forest management plans, including through the creation of common guidelines for their establishment and implementation; calls on the Member States to reinforce the use of forest management plans and to closely monitor their implementation while respecting the proportionality and subsidiarity principles; stresses that a platform is needed in order to find solutions for the many challenges related to forests and forest management at EU level; considers that forest management models must incorporate the criterion of environmental, societal and economic sustainability, which means that the stewardship

²¹ European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2020 on the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0015.

and use of forests and forest lands are such that they maintain their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant environmental, economic and social functions at local, national and global levels, and do not cause damage to other ecosystems²²; calls on the Commission to develop a common and sufficiently detailed definition of close-to-nature forestry, building on the ongoing experiences of integrating biodiversity considerations into forest management;

79. Stresses that forest fires are a regular occurrence, and are both a cause and a consequence of climate change; notes that storms, forest fires and pests can be mitigated using improved and more active forest management and forestry techniques through, for example, grazing and agroforestry practices, which should be supported within the framework of the CAP;
80. Highlights the need for effective conservation and strict protection of primary and old-growth forests, taking into account their unique characteristics; notes that there is no EU definition of old-growth forests and calls on the Commission to introduce a definition in the future EU forestry strategy, taking into consideration the different characteristics of forests and the need for effective conservation, and in particular of primary and old-growth forests; notes with concern that data on primary forests remains incomplete, but according to available information, only 46 % of mapped primary forests in Europe have the highest status of protection, 24 % are afforded a status of national parks and 11 % remain unprotected²³; calls on the Commission to propose without delay a comprehensive definition of primary forests and work to improve data collection on primary forests;
81. Highlights the importance of environmental defenders in common efforts to protect and restore EU forests; calls for a zero-tolerance approach to attacks or harassment against them;
82. Considers that overdue steps are needed to introduce an EU disaster-prevention approach, which should be provided with appropriate financial resources from the EU budget;
83. Takes the view that education plays an essential role in sustainable forest management, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to support training focusing on forests, both in the EU and in third countries, including providing stipends and arranging academic exchange programmes;
84. Recalls its support for a European legal framework based on mandatory due diligence to regulate access to the EU market only to products and commodities that do not contribute to deforestation or forest degradation, nor to the conversion or degradation of other natural ecosystems; believes that such framework should apply to all economic actors, including financial actors, both upstream and downstream of the supply chain, and should also ensure the absence of related human rights violations; urges the

²² Resolution H1, General Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Forests in Europe, Second Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, 16-17 June 1993, Helsinki.

²³ Sabatini, F.M., Burrascano, S., et al., 'Where are Europe's last primary forests?'. In *Diversity and Distributions*, first published on 24 May 2018: Volume 24, Issue 10, October 2018, pp. 1426-1439, figure 3.

Commission to adopt this proposal without delay;

85. Calls on the Commission to address the concerns of professionals in the field regarding the Renewable Energy Directive, in particular the issue of categorising all types of biomass as renewable energy sources, *inter alia* in relation to the high level of wood pellet imports into the EU and the potential risks that these imports pose to forests in third countries, and to continue to promote other sustainable forms of renewable energy;
86. Stresses that tree planting schemes must be an adjunct to restoring natural forests as the wrong tree in the wrong place can intensify forest fires and actually release more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere; notes that forest-restoration schemes must increase their carbon sequestration potential to meet global climate commitments;
87. Takes the view that a system monitoring pest outbreaks in the EU may be needed to obtain the full picture with regard to the condition of forests and their impact on forest biodiversity, given the expected impact of climate change on distribution of harmful organisms;
88. Takes the view that urgent action should be taken to prevent the introduction through international trade of new pests and diseases and their respective vectors;
89. Believes that, taking into account legislation on invasive alien species and the potential repercussions that these species may have on forests, the Commission should propose new complementary financial tools to help affected areas tackle invasive species, and in particular persistent and new alien species;
90. Considers that more attention should be paid to the problem of diseases, such as oak decline, that affect trees, which are in decline around the world as a result of pests, diseases and climate change; draws attention to oak decline, which is ravaging cork-oak plantations in Portugal, France and Spain and is also affecting special protection areas (SPAs) and biosphere reserves; believes that the Commission should have included in the strategy effective measures and specific resources for tackling tree diseases.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	22.6.2020
Result of final vote	+: 55 -: 13 0: 8
Members present for the final vote	Nikos Androulakis, Bartosz Arłukowicz, Margrete Auken, Simona Baldassarre, Marek Paweł Balt, Traian Băsescu, Aurelia Beigneux, Sergio Berlato, Alexander Bernhuber, Simona Bonafè, Delara Burkhardt, Pascal Canfin, Sara Cerdas, Mohammed Chahim, Tudor Ciuhodaru, Nathalie Colin-Oesterlé, Miriam Dalli, Esther de Lange, Christian Doleschal, Marco Dreosto, Bas Eickhout, Agnès Evren, Pietro Fiocchi, Catherine Griset, Jytte Guteland, Teuvo Hakkarainen, Anja Hazekamp, Martin Hojsík, Pär Holmgren, Jan Huitema, Adam Jarubas, Petros Kokkalis, Ewa Kopacz, Peter Liese, Sylvia Limmer, Javi López, César Luena, Fulvio Martusciello, Liudas Mažylis, Joëlle Mélin, Tilly Metz, Silvia Modig, Dolors Montserrat, Alessandra Moretti, Dan-Ștefan Motreanu, Ville Niinistö, Ljudmila Novak, Grace O’Sullivan, Jutta Paulus, Jessica Polfjård, Luisa Regimenti, Frédérique Ries, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Sándor Rónai, Rob Rooken, Silvia Sardone, Christine Schneider, Linea Søgaaard-Lidell, Nicolae Ștefănuță, Nils Torvalds, Edina Tóth, Véronique Trillet-Lenoir, Petar Vitanov, Alexandr Vondra, Mick Wallace, Pernille Weiss, Michal Wiezik, Tiemo Wölken, Anna Zalewska
Substitutes present for the final vote	Margarita de la Pisa Carrión, João Ferreira, Billy Kelleher, Ulrike Müller, Piernicola Pedicini, Christel Schaldemose, Andrey Slabakov

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

55	+
GUE/NGL	Silvia Modig
NI	Piernicola Pedicini
PPE	Bartosz Arłukowicz, Traian Băsescu, Alexander Bernhuber, Nathalie Colin-Oesterlé, Christian Doleschal, Agnès Evren, Adam Jarubas, Ewa Kopacz, Esther De Lange, Peter Liese, Fulvio Martusciello, Liudas Mažylis, Dolores Montserrat, Dan-Ștefan Motreanu, Ljudmila Novak, Jessica Polfjård, Christine Schneider, Edina Tóth, Pernille Weiss, Michal Wiezik
RENEW	Pascal Canfin, Martin Hojsík, Jan Huitema, Billy Kelleher, Frédérique Ries, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Linea Sogaard-Lidell, Nicolae Ștefănuță, Nils Torvalds, Véronique Trillet-Lenoir
S&D	Nikos Androulakis, Marek Balt, Simona Bonafè, Delara Burkhardt, Sara Cerdas, Mohammed Chahim, Tudor Ciuhodaru, Miriam Dalli, Jytte Guteland, Javi López, César Luena, Alessandra Moretti, Sándor Rónai, Christel Schaldemose, Petar Vitanov, Tiemo Wölken
VERTS/ALE	Margrete Auken, Bas Eickhout, Pär Holmgren, Tilly Metz, Ville Niinistö, Grace O'sullivan, Jutta Paulus

13	-
ECR	Sergio Berlato, Pietro Fiocchi, Rob Rooker, Andrey Slabakov, Alexandr Vondra, Anna Zalewska
ID	Simona Baldassarre, Marco Dreosto, Teuvo Hakkarainen, Sylvia Limmer, Luisa Regimenti, Silvia Sardone
GUE	Mick Wallace

8	0
ECR	Margarita De La Pisa Carrión
GUE	João Ferreira, Anja Hazekamp, Petros Kokkalis
ID	Aurelia Beigneux, Catherine Griset, Joëlle Mélin
RENEW	Ulrike Müller

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention