The EU vision of a resource-efficient economy envisaged for 2020 will require new and innovative approaches to the management of natural resources inside and outside of Europe. Greater emphasis will need to be placed on ensuring sustainable practices for the sourcing of all raw materials and commodities. Policymakers, industry and civil society will need to work together to find the best tools to ensure that sustainable resource management will move beyond vision to reality.

As regards the responsible management of our forests, we have seen significant policy developments this year. We have therefore chosen to use this summer newsletter to shine a spotlight on some of the opinions and initiatives of key actors with a stake in European forestry policy.

The entry into force in March of the EU Timber Regulation, banning illegal timber from entering the EU, is a milestone. It is not journey’s end. As WWF’s Tony Long points out, “Legality is not the same thing as sustainability” (see page 4).

This summer, the EU Commission will unveil its revised EU Forest Strategy. We also await Forest Europe’s Legally Binding Agreement, which will break new ground by providing a legally binding definition of “sustainable forest management” across Europe (see page 2).

With forests covering over 40% of the EU’s land area, Europe’s 2013 agenda presents a real opportunity to move the sustainability agenda forward. However, drawing up sustainability criteria is one thing; practical implementation is another. So how can we move towards true sustainability for the management of our forests? And are we setting the right pace for required actions?

Commissioner Cioloș, in charge of the upcoming revision of the EU forest strategy, believes sustainable forest management to be a cornerstone of EU rural policies. However, sustainability cannot be achieved, says MEP Bas Eickhout, without binding sustainability criteria for solid biomass (see page 5).

Agreeing what is meant by “sustainable forest management” – a complex principle often difficult to pin down – is important, creating a benchmark against which to measure progress.

For ACE’s beverage carton manufacturers and their paperboard suppliers, certified compliance with the standards set by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) provides one valuable way forward. Besides being independently certified, the credibility of FSC sustainability standards derive from the fact that those standards are developed in an inclusive manner, in dialogue with all key stakeholders (see page 2). ACE members are committed to protect their renewable forestry resource and are actively promoting responsible forest management practices, as expressed in the ACE Voluntary Commitment on Wood Traceability (see page 6).

In this vein, I hope our members’ efforts to support sustainable forest management, like beverage carton producer SIG Combibloc’s and paperboard supplier BillerudKorsnäs’ (see page 3), will inspire other stakeholders in the forestry-based sector to follow suit.

Beyond meeting legal requirements, sustainable forest management means continuously pushing back the frontier of best practice with like-minded stakeholders throughout value chains – and always keeping ahead of the curve.

Katarina Molin, Director General

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A PAN-EUROPEAN LEGALLY BINDING AGREEMENT IN SIGHT

A Legally Binding Agreement (LBA) which could be reached later this year would mark a major step towards securing sustainable management of forests across the entire European continent. So far no such agreement exists in Europe or at the global level. Negotiations should be finalised by the end of June. Ministers responsible for forests from 46 states, including countries like Russia, Ukraine and Turkey as well as those of the EU-27, should be ready to take a decision on the LBA in November.

Introducing a legally binding definition of what is meant by “sustainable forest management” (SFM) would be done by using criteria as a guiding framework for policy development on forests and their management. Further, the LBA would include articles on substantive issues such as forests and their contribution to global carbon cycles; on forest health and vitality; and on forests’ productive, protective and socio-economic functions.

Governments signing up to the LBA would be obliged to have in place or adopt legislation and policy measures for implementation of the commitments. On forests’ productive functions, for example, measures are called for that specifically aim to increase the use of wood from sustainably managed forests as a substitute for non-renewable materials; on biodiversity, measures that protect/restore biodiversity by making it an integral part of sustainable forest management.

In the long run, the LBA would create a harmonized legal framework continent-wide. This in turn would tend to foster a level playing field for all stakeholders involved in the forestry sector across Europe. It would support existing national forest programmes in Europe, where the level of SFM is generally rather high. At a regional level, the LBA would also, for example, help the EU attain the aims of its forest and biodiversity strategies as well as of the Timber Regulation.

About FOREST EUROPE

The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, now called FOREST EUROPE, is a pan-European political process for enhancing sustainable management of the continent’s forests that started in 1990. At the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference held in Oslo on 14-16 June 2011, Ministers responsible for forests decided to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee with the mandate to develop a legally binding agreement on forests in Europe.
FROM FOREST TO CARTON TO CONSUMER:
A COMPLETE CHAIN OF CUSTODY VERIFICATION

For all those committed to the spread of responsible forestry practices, the EU’s 2013 agenda appears off to a promising start. Implementation in March of the EU Timber Regulation, seeking to eliminate illegally-sourced timber from Europe’s marketplace, sends an important signal. Yet it is only an initial step and, for SIG Combibloc, not enough on its own.

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The bigger challenge is to meet growing demands both for long-term raw material supply and also from consumers who buy the drinks we package (see box). With 75% of our carton packs made from wood fibres, these demands increasingly converge on a common priority: forests that are sustainably managed and verifiably so. Simple compliance with legal minima neither ensures the future resilience of our supply base nor reassures consumers seeking proof that our packages can ultimately be traced back to forests managed to the highest standards.

Traceability is part of the response. Since 2009, SIG Combibloc is certified in accordance with the criteria of the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) for a complete chain of custody verification (trademark license code FSC®C020428). This system ensures that only timber from well managed forests and other controlled sources is used in the production of our packs.

The newer part of the challenge is to communicate the sustainability message to final consumers – in effect helping to enlist them as supporters of responsible forest management. FSC, created in 1993 following the Rio Earth Summit, has a key role to play here too. We are progressively seeking to have our packs labelled ‘FSC mix’, which goes beyond just legal sourcing of wood as it guarantees that corresponding wood volumes from sustainably managed forests are used in the value chain. Our global target is to reach 60% of FSC labelled cartons by end 2014.

“Increasingly consumers want to know where their wood comes from and to be assured that today’s forests will be here tomorrow for their children and grandchildren”

SIG is a member of the WWF Global Forest and Trade Network

CONFERENCE APPROACH TO MEET EVOLVING CHALLENGES:
A PAPERBOARD COMPANY PERSPECTIVE

Certification, traceability and scientific research are at the heart of our approach to sustainable forest management (SFM). For BillerudKorsnäs, systematic partnering with other stakeholders is a key requirement for this approach to work. Experience tells us that ongoing progress towards sustainable forestry practices is the joint responsibility of all those involved in the value chain of wood-based products.

Tracing back the timber we use to the forests that source it is an important part of our contribution to SFM. We are actively engaged in the certification schemes of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), and in their further development. By 2011 about 40% of the forest raw material Billerud bought in was FSC/PEFC certified; enabling us to sell a corresponding proportion of FSC or PEFC certified products.

Together with others in our sector, we participate in Future Forests, a programme at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences researching sustainable forest management and various forest issues e.g. forest soils and water, climate change mitigation, and adapting to competing demands on forests. (See: http://www.slu.se/en/ collaborative-centres-and-projects/future-forests). We are gaining a better understanding of the complex and evolving nature of the sustainable forestry challenge – with its mix of social, environmental and economic requirements – and therefore of how effectively to respond to it.

We welcome this year’s heightened focus on forestry. As Europe faces a world of general resource scarcity, Europe’s forest products sector has a positive story to tell. It would be easier to tell, if we could communicate on the basis of commonly accepted principles and definitions – starting with one for sustainable forest management (see Forest Europe’s Legally Binding Agreement). For every fully mature tree BillerudKorsnäs uses, 2-4 new ones are planted. While most of these trees are used again, some of them are passed to coming generations as we leave them as special set-aside areas or eternity trees within the planted stand. Over time this gives us an increasing standing biomass, in combination with higher yield per tree.

However, this story is only partly about expanding a renewable resource base. It is also about the concerted approach needed to address the changing requirements for managing forests sustainably.

“Increasingly consumers want to know where their wood comes from and to be assured that today’s forests will be here tomorrow for their children and grandchildren”

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Conference approach to meet evolving challenges:
A paperboard company perspective

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RESPONSIBLE FORESTRY: PRACTICAL ACTIONS FRAMED IN A EUROPEAN-WIDE APPROACH

Responsible management of forests is vital if the increased worldwide, national and local pressures they face are to be managed effectively and the harmful consequences of current economic pressures operating on them are to be mitigated. The question can be put simply: are practices which strike a better balance between the economic demands on forests and the maintenance and enhancement of their ecological and social functions going to come urgently or will we drift along not aware that an urgent correction is necessary?

We are looking forward to the EU Forest Strategy and Europe’s Legally Binding Agreement initiatives on which decisions are expected this year. They will be scrutinised to see what difference they make in practice to forest management. How far will they be able to ensure a new and fresh, responsible and balanced management of our forest resources?

The portents are good. The recently introduced EU Timber Regulation, on whose drafting WWF and ACE cooperated extensively over several years, marks major progress. It is a big step forward in seeking to stop the trade in illegal timber and timber products entering the EU market. But this is only a first step.

Legality is not the same thing as sustainability. Just because timber is legal does not mean that these timber products have been produced without damage to valuable ecosystems. It is incumbent on us all, inside and outside the industry, to make sure that timber products in the EU come from responsibly managed forest sources.

The EU Forest Strategy now under review is an opportunity to move towards this target. In order to do so, the review will need, at a minimum, fully to implement and monitor the first two of the key recommendations the Commission itself made following the assessment of the EU Forest Action Plan (2007-2011) – see box.

There is, of course, no common EU Forest Policy. In the absence of such a common policy, it is even more important that the different EU and Member State policies work in harmony with each other. The assessment of the EU Forest Action Plan showed that a lot still needs to be done in this regard.

There are many expectations riding on the new EU Forest Strategy. Let us hope that we will not be disappointed – for the sake of the forests, for the sake of biodiversity and for the future economic vitality of the sector itself.

Priorities for EU Forest Strategy
- Assess present and future society demands on forests
- Balance the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, environment, social)
- Adopt a holistic view of sustainable forest management (SFM) in the EU
- Build capacities at EU and in Member States to promote SFM – e.g. in forest information and monitoring, research and innovation, education, advisory services and communication

Tony Long, Director European Policy Office WWF
SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA FOR BIO ENERGY:
A MUCH NEEDED TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Sustainably managed forests can provide multiple services to society and nature in Europe. Who does not enjoy biking or walking in the forest? Forests also naturally produce important environmental benefits like biodiversity conservation and soil protection. And European forests stock almost ten billion tons of carbon; equivalent to nine years of total EU emissions!

Yet maintaining forests’ role as carbon sinks is in jeopardy. The main culprit is a European policy framework driving the greater use of bioenergy up to 2020. There will simply not be enough wood resources in the EU to supply this demand, without leaving shortages for the forest-based industries and creating new pressures on the sustainable management of forests.

In 2010, European countries burned 13 million tons of wood pellets for electricity generation and heat. Burning wood for energy is being promoted by EU policies in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on the wrong premise that biomass combustion is carbon neutral. As highlighted by the European Environment Agency’s Scientific Committee, “this mistaken assumption results in a serious accounting error”.

Intensifying forest use and expanding logging activities could destroy and degrade forest ecosystems in Europe. Estimates are that in the short to medium term, additional felling could actually emit more carbon than a fossil-fuel system. Additional logging for bioenergy can hence lead to a decrease of the overall carbon stock of forests.

Falsely assuming carbon neutrality for all sources of biomass leads to potentially dire consequences, among them: very inefficient use of biomass resources and negative climate impact for the atmosphere. Hence, the European Parliament’s call for the Commission to propose binding sustainability criteria for solid biomass. Otherwise the burning of wood in inefficient, coal-fired power plants could exacerbate climate change. Our forests are too valuable to be wasted like that.

Using forest for bio energy is the most inefficient use of our biomass. Without ensuring the real sustainability of bio energy, no sustainable forest strategy will succeed.

SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT:
CONTRIBUTING TO EU RURAL DEVELOPMENT

With forests covering over 40% of the EU’s land area it is clear that a policy aiming at developing rural areas has to address forests and forestry. This is why both the current Rural Development Regulation for the period 2007-2013 and its successor, now being discussed in Council and Parliament, recognise the importance of agriculture and silviculture in land use and in the management of natural resources.

If we want forests to maintain and optimize their functions in order to benefit all society, we must ensure that they contribute to the creation of wealth and jobs in rural areas. Sustainable forest management, which provides goods and services in a balanced way, ensures that the protection of forests is a key pillar of rural development.

The new forest strategy in preparation, seeks to improve coordination between the Commission, Member States and stakeholders through a holistic view of forest management; one which covers the multiple benefits of forests, integrates internal and external aspects of forest policy and also takes account of the value chain. The aim is to establish fundamental principles for promoting sustainable forest management, and improving competitiveness and job creation, particularly in rural areas, while ensuring the protection and provision of ecosystem services that depend on forests.
NEW REPORT COMING UP IN SEPTEMBER

Traceability is one of industry’s most important strategic means to combat illegal logging and to avoid using unacceptable sources of wood. ACE members and their paperboard suppliers have put in place rigorous traceability systems so that they can track their wood from the forest to the final product. These systems are independently verified and certified annually according to ‘Chain of Custody’ (CoC) standards set by the FSC.

In 2007, Elopak, SIG Combibloc and Tetra Pak additionally initiated a global voluntary sector commitment on wood traceability to achieve 100% chain-of-custody certification for all liquid packaging board purchased worldwide for the manufacture of beverage cartons by 2015 and for all their own packaging material manufacturing plants by 2018.

This worldwide industry commitment is subject to an annual review by Proforest, an independent verifier of forest supply chain practices. Their report for 2011 showed that 85% of liquid packaging board purchased by ACE beverage carton manufacturers meets the ACE definition of legal and acceptable sources. The percentage of paper mills with a FSC certification has increased from 6% in the first year of reporting in 2007 to 74% (40 mills out of 54 mills) in 2011.

In September, the sixth Proforest report will be available at: www.beveragecarton.eu

THE ACE VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT ON WOOD TRACEABILITY

FOREST PAPER MILL CARTON MANUFACTURER

100% CoC NOW 100% CoC by 2018

100% CoC by 2015 100% CoC by 2018

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SIG Combibloc: FSC labelled beverage cartons introduced in 21 countries worldwide

ACE member SIG Combibloc – the first carton pack manufacturer to achieve 100% supply from FSC CoC certified paper mills and full FSC CoC certification of its production facilities plus sales units worldwide – has continuously introduced FSC labelled carton packs in key markets around the world, including Europe. Today, FSC labelled carton packs account for more than 1,600 different product packs in 21 countries. SIG Combibloc aims to increase its production of FSC labelled carton packs to 40% by the end of 2014.

For more information see www.sig.biz

The natural part in Smarter Packaging

Billerud and Korsnäs have merged to create BillerudKorsnäs, a leading provider of renewable packaging material. The company states it will continue to challenge conventional packaging with innovation and high-performance solutions for a sustainable future. BillerudKorsnäs promises to put packaging to a greater context to save resources, grow brands and increase profitability. The company now has sales of SEK 20 billion and approximately 4,400 employees in 13 countries. The merger was approved by competition authorities in November 2012.

For more information: www.billerudkorsnas.com

ACE event on sustainable forest management this autumn

This autumn ACE looks forward to furthering the discussion on sustainable forest management in the context of 2013 EU forestry policy developments at an event with forestry stakeholders.

More details will be announced on the ACE website soon: www.beveragecarton.eu

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