

DEVE-012

Brussels, 3 March 2003

OPINION

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 12 February 2003

on the

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Regulation

concerning monitoring of forests and environmental interactions in the Community

(Forest Focus)

(COM(2002) 404 final – 2002/0146(COD))

The Committee of the Regions,

HAVING REGARD TO the proposal for a European Parliament and Council Regulation concerning monitoring of forests and environmental interactions in the Community (Forest Focus) (COM(2002) 404 final – 2002/0146 (COD));

HAVING REGARD TO the Council's decision of 26 July 2002 to consult it on this matter, under the first paragraph of Article 175 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of its president of 23 September 2002 to instruct the Commission for Sustainable Development to draw up an opinion on this subject;

HAVING REGARD TO the Council Resolution of 15 December on a Forestry strategy for the European Union¹;

HAVING REGARD TO the European Parliament Resolution of 31 January 1997 on the European Union's forestry strategy²;

HAVING REGARD TO the recommendations made in its Opinion on *Management, use and protection of forests in the EU* (CdR 268/1997)³;

HAVING REGARD TO its Opinion of 18 November 1999 on the Commission Communication on a forestry strategy for the European Union (CdR 184/1999)⁴;

HAVING REGARD TO the draft Opinion (CdR 345/2002 rev. 1) adopted by the Commission for Sustainable Development on 12 December 2002 (rapporteur: **Mr Durnwalder**, Governor of the Autonomous Province of Bozen-Südtirol/Bolzano-Alto Adige, I/EPP);

adopted the following opinion at its 48th plenary session, held on 12/13 February 2003 (meeting on 12 February).

Introduction

The Committee of the Regions,

1. welcomes the Commission's efforts to establish a new EU-coordinated scheme for monitoring forests and environmental interactions to protect the Community's forests, which develops and consolidates the objectives of Regulation 3528/86/EEC;
2. points out, however, that a comprehensive long-term monitoring scheme to oversee the condition of forest ecosystems absolutely must take all causes of damage into account, i.e. natural causes (parasite infection, disease, weather effects) as well as anthropogenic factors (atmospheric pollution);
3. highlights the need for the entities that provide the data – i.e. the Member States and local and regional authorities – to have the possibility to monitor how the data is used and disseminated;
4. stresses the need to employ comparable, internationally consolidated standards in order to achieve effective monitoring with viable scientific data;
5. regrets that the definition of forest ecosystems in the proposed directive (Article 3(1)(a)) is not consistent with the fundamental aims of the proposal;
6. notes that limiting the new monitoring scheme to just six years might not allow efficient and successful long-term monitoring and proposes that the scheme last twelve years instead (see point 13);
7. emphasises that the new scheme provides for complicated investigations entailing considerable extra investment costs in the testing areas, which have to be covered by adequate funding. It assumes that the funds provided for in the proposal for a regulation take specific account of this;
8. calls for the relevant local authorities to be fully involved in the implementation and application of the monitoring scheme, and especially in managing local observation areas. The role of local authorities should be clearly defined in the context of the subsidiarity principle.

Recommendations

The Committee of the Regions,

9. recommends that Article 1(a) should be amended to read as follows:

" monitoring and protection of forests against atmospheric pollution and natural damage (parasitic infection, other diseases, weather effects, etc.);

10. recommends that Article 2(2) be amended to read as follows:

" The actions set out in paragraph 1 shall be complementary to Community research programmes, while respecting consolidated international standards";

11. recommends with regard to Article 3(1), definitions, that a distinction be made between (a) "forests" and (b) "forest ecosystems", the distinctive feature of a forest ecosystem being the presence of a recognisable forest soil;
12. recommends that Article 4(1)(a) be amended to read as follows:

" continue and further develop a systematic network of observation points, while incorporating existing key plots from various European research programmes (e.g. ICP-Forests, ICP-IM, CARBOEUROPE), in order to conduct periodic inventories in order to get representative information of forest ecosystems conditions";

13. recommends in relation to Article 4(2) that the criteria for selecting observation points for the intensive monitoring network, which are to be laid down in the implementation rules, should also include those sites offering longer data series for key chemical and physical parameters such as climate, levels of pollution, location variables, etc. and which receive long-term resources (financial and logistical) from the relevant local or regional authorities;
14. disapproves of the obligation on Member States set out in Article 8 (4) to submit an ex-ante evaluation to the Commission;
15. recommends in relation to Article 12(1) that the scheme run for at least 10 years if it is supposed to be a long-term project;
16. calls in relation to Article 13 for an increase in the financial resources provided for in the interests of a long-term approach to the programme, with investment costs being recognised as eligible for co-financing;
17. with regard to Articles 8 and 14, calls on the Commission to stipulate in its proposal that Member States should be bound to involve the relevant local or regional authorities more closely;
18. recommends that the introductory sentence of Articles 6(1) and 7(1) of the proposed Commission Regulation begin as follows: "For the realisation of the aims set out in Article 1 (D), the Member States and the Commission, in conjunction with the regional and local authorities, shall ...";

19. recommends with regard to point 5.2 of the Annex that the target population should also include regional groupings addressing similar issues (cross-regional studies, demonstration projects, experiments);
20. recommends, in relation to Article 17(1) of the proposed Commission Regulation, that the Commission coordinate its recommendations on forest monitoring with the standing Forestry Committee.

Brussels, 12 February 2003.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Albert Bore

Vincenzo Falcone

¹ OJ C 56, 26.2.1999, p. 1

² OJ C 55, 24.2.1997, p. 22

³ OJ C 64, 27.2.1998, p. 25

⁴ OJ C 57, 29.2.2000, p. 96

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CdR 345/2002 fin EN/o-DE/Ho/ht

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