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NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION

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19 – 21 October 2021

LINKING THE WORK OF FAO FOREST-RELATED STATUTORY BODIES WITH RELEVANT POLICY AREAS, AND FACILITATING POLICY DIALOGUES AND TECHNICAL EXCHANGES

Executive Summary

Following its dialogue with Statutory Bodies during its 25th Session, held on 5-9 October 2020, the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) requested FAO to consult with the Regional Forestry Commissions on ways to help facilitate their policy dialogues and technical exchanges to assist them in achieving their Members' goals and contributions to international processes and goals, and invited FAO to explore options for further linking the work of these Statutory Bodies to the work of the Forestry Division and other policy areas with relevance for forestry, in order to increase their relevance and efficiency and to create synergies and enhance participation. The purpose of this paper is to support discussion by the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC) on ways to help facilitate policy dialogues and technical exchanges. It also seeks inputs on possible options for further linking the work of the forest-related FAO Statutory Bodies to the work of the Forestry Division and other policy areas with relevance for forestry to increase their relevance and efficiency and to create synergies and enhance participation.

Suggested action by the Commission

The Commission is invited to discuss ways to help facilitate its policy dialogue and technical exchanges to assist in achieving its Members' goals and their contributions to international processes and goals. The Commission may wish to use questions contained in Annex 1 of this paper to guide the discussion, and consider:

- to synchronize the calendar of future NEFRC meetings with the timetable of FAO Regional Conference for Near East (NERC) meetings, in order to provide inputs from the Commission to the NERC in a more timely manner;
- to strengthen the cross-sectorial work of the NEFRC, especially on forestry and agri-food systems matters, by providing relevant and useful inputs to their Members, to

FAO (including through the NERC) and to other international processes on forest-related issues;

- ways to further enhance the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the RFCs and other FAO forest-related Statutory Bodies;
- ways to increase participation in meetings of the Statutory Bodies.

The Commission may wish to request FAO to:

- invite the NEFRC Chairperson to attend the Regional Conference and enhance inter-sessional activities by improving interactions between NEFRC and NERC Members, including Rome-based delegations, with a view to strengthening cross-sectorial policy dialogue and to ensure that important regional forestry matters are integrated in the themes of the Regional Conferences;
- consider undertaking a detailed review of NEFRC with the aim of further enhancing its relevance, including the focus on Agenda 2030 and the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-30, and its efficiency and effectiveness;
- communicate the results of the discussion on this item to the next session of COFO for its consideration.

Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:

NEFRC Secretariat
Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE)
 Abdel Hamied.Hamid@fao.org

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Following its dialogue with Statutory Bodies during its 25th Session, held on 5-9 October 2020, the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO):

- requested FAO to consult with the Regional Forestry Commissions on ways to help facilitate their policy dialogues and technical exchanges to assist them in achieving their Members' goals and contributions to international processes and goals.¹
- invited FAO to explore options for further linking the work of these Statutory Bodies to the work of the Forestry Division and other policy areas with relevance for forestry, in order to increase their relevance and efficiency and to create synergies and enhance participation.²

II. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF DISCUSSION PAPER

2. The purpose of this paper is to support discussion by the Regional Forestry Commissions (RFCs) on ways to help facilitate their policy dialogues and technical exchanges to assist them in achieving their Members' goals and contributions to international processes. It also seeks inputs on possible options for further linking the work of the forest-related FAO Statutory Bodies to the work of the Forestry Division and other policy areas with

¹ Para 35, C 2021/24

² Para 40, C 2021/24

relevance for forestry to increase their relevance and efficiency and to create synergies and enhance participation.

III. BACKGROUND

3. FAO has the following forest-related Statutory Bodies, six of which are RFCs, namely:

Regional Forestry Commissions:

- African Forestry and Wildlife Commission (AFWC)
- Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC)
- European Forestry Commission (EFC)
- Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission (LACFC)
- Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC)
- North American Forest Commission (NAFC)

Other Forest-Related Statutory Bodies:

- Advisory Committee on Sustainable Forest-based Industries (ACSF)
- AFWC/EFC/NEFRC Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions “*Silva Mediterranea*”
- International Commission on Poplars and Other Fast-Growing Trees Sustaining People and the Environment (IPC)
- Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Forest Genetic Resources (ITWG-FGR)
- Panel of Experts on Forest Gene Resources

4. The Regional Forestry Commissions, which cover the whole world, were established between 1947 and 1958. Each commission provides advice on the formulation of forest management policy; reviews and coordinates implementation at the regional level; exchanges information; advises on suitable practices and actions with regard to technical problems; and makes appropriate recommendations. In addition to forests, the AFWC mandate includes wildlife and the NEFRC mandate includes rangelands. The legal framework for the RFCs is provided by Article VI.1 of the FAO Constitution and their membership is open to Member Nations and Associate Members. The RFCs report to COFO and to their respective FAO Regional Conferences. The RFCs normally meet every two years to consider both policy and technical issues. They also provide a link between the global dialogue at the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and national implementation. Most of the RFCs have technical working groups that undertake inter-sessional work on issues of regional priority.³

5. The RFCs typically discuss a number of common items and receive reports on country activities and progress by their working groups. At recent meetings, common items have included implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests and collaboration with the UNFF; preparations for the 2020 COFO Session and the XV World Forestry Congress; FAO's work on biodiversity; climate change; forest landscape restoration and forest value chains. Other matters of regional significance have included illicit exploitation and trade of forest and wildlife products (AFWC); forests for peace and well-being (APFC); forests and

³ Further detail of the mandate for each Statutory Body is available at <http://www.fao.org/unfao/govbodies/gsb-subject-matter/subject-matter/en/>.

the circular economy (EFC); sustainable agriculture and resilience to climate change (LAC); and forest protection (NEFRC).⁴

6. The Advisory Committee on Sustainable Forest-based Industries (ACFSI) was established in 1960 as the Advisory Council on Paper and Wood Products, but its name was changed in 2012 as part of a renewal process. It provides advice to FAO and its member countries on the sustainable production and consumption of forest industry products, including related policy work and regulatory matters; assists FAO in identifying key issues across forest industry value chains; seeks to maximize benefits from innovations and more efficient processing of forest products; and improves knowledge and training on best practices. ACSFI operates under Article VI.2 of the FAO Constitution and its members are appointed in their personal capacity.⁵

7. “*Silva Mediterranea*” was established in 1948 to review trends in the use of forest land in the Mediterranean area and assess the impact of changes; to identify forestry research priorities; and to carry out technical studies and surveys related to the formulation and implementation of national forest policies. The legal framework is provided by Article VI.1 of the FAO Constitution. Its members comprise those members of AFWC, EFC and NEFRC with an interest in the Mediterranean basin. “*Silva Mediterranea*” currently has six working groups on: forest fires; cork oak and non-timber forest products; forest management and sustainable development; forest genetic resources; urban and peri-urban forestry; and desertification and restoration in Mediterranean drylands.⁶

8. The International Commission on Poplars and Other Fast-Growing Trees Sustaining People and the Environment (IPC) was established in 1947, as the International Commission on Poplars. Its legal framework is provided, under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution, by the Convention on the International Commission on Poplars and other Fast-Growing Trees, which was amended in 2019 to include other fast-growing trees in addition to poplars and willows. It has 38 members, all of whom are Member Nations that have acceded to the Convention. The role of the IPC is to foster the sustainable management of fast-growing trees through the facilitation of technical exchange on sustainable management practices and joint research programmes. It has six working parties, dealing with taxonomy, genetic resources, plant health, sustainable livelihoods, environmental and ecosystem services, and policy, communication and outreach.⁷

9. The Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Forest Genetic Resources (ITWG-FGR) was established by the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture at its Twelfth Regular Session in 2009. The purpose of the ITWG-FGR is to review the situation and issues related to forest genetic resources, and to advise and make recommendations to the Commission on these matters. The Working Group also considers the progress made in implementing the Commission's programme of work on forest genetic resources, as well as any other matters referred to it by the Commission. The terms of reference and regional composition of the Working Group are described in its Statutes⁸

⁴ Further detail is available at <http://www.fao.org/forestry/30106/en/>

⁵ Further detail is available at <http://www.fao.org/forestry/industries/en/>

⁶ Further detail is available at <http://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/en/>

⁷ Further detail is available at <http://www.fao.org/ipc/overview/en/>.

⁸ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/Inf.1, <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3679en/cb3679en.pdf>

adopted by the Commission. The Working Group is composed of 28 Member Countries (five from Africa; five from Asia, five from Europe, five from Latin America, four from the Near East, two from North America and two from the Southwest Pacific), which are elected every two years during regular sessions of the Commission. The ITWG-FGR normally holds one session every biennium. The Secretariat of the ITWG-FGR is hosted by the Forestry Division.

10. The Panel of Experts on Forest Gene Resources was established by the Director-General in 1968 at the request of the Fourteenth Session of the FAO Conference (1967) with a mandate to "help plan and coordinate FAO's efforts to explore, utilize and conserve the gene resources of forest trees and, in particular, help prepare detailed short- and long-term programmes of action, and to provide information to Member Governments". The members of the panel, appointed by the FAO Director-General, represent various regions of the world and cover a broad range of technical and scientific areas in the field of forest genetic resources. Following the establishment of the ITWG-FGR, the functions of the Panel were largely taken over by the ITWG-FGR.

11. The FAO Statutory Bodies have strong links with other bodies, institutions and networks at the national, regional and global level. In addition to participation by FAO and its Member Nations, meetings of RFCs are normally attended by representatives of institutions of the UN system (including the UNFF secretariat) as well as observers from related regional and sub-regional organizations and processes, non-governmental organizations, research institutions and other bodies (such as the International Forestry Students' Association). In addition, the RFC and "*Silva Mediterranea*" working groups provide opportunities for engagement with wider networks of technical experts. Participation in IPC also reflects the technical nature of its activities. The members of ACSFI are senior executives from the private industry sector and representatives of forest growers' associations.

IV. MEASURES TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FAO FOREST-RELATED STATUTORY BODIES

12. At its 20th session, held on 4-8 October 2010, COFO agreed that, in keeping with the tradition started at its 18th Session, its Steering Committee should comprise the Chairpersons of the RFCs, or their representatives. This innovation has strengthened coordination between regional and global levels.

13. The FAO Office of Evaluation assessed the forest-related Statutory Bodies during a Strategic Evaluation of FAO's work in Forestry, undertaken in 2011-12. The evaluation report noted the action that had been taken to better coordinate the agenda of FAO's statutory bodies at global level and the steps that had been taken to ensure that inputs from RFCs were made to FAO's Regional Conferences. Following the evaluation, further action was taken to improve collaboration between the Statutory Bodies, including a mapping exercise to help coordinate the activities of the RFC thematic working groups, the renewal of the ACSFI, and the widening of the role of the IPC.⁹

14. COFO has subsequently continued to encourage action aimed at further improving the effectiveness of the RFCs and other forest-related Statutory Bodies:

⁹ Paras 11 and Matrix, *Follow-up on the Strategic Evaluation of the FAO's role and work in forestry*, PC 116/10

(a) At its 22nd Session, in 2014, COFO encouraged the RFCs to provide guidance on areas of regional priority in forestry that inform and contribute to FAO's Strategic Objectives. In addition, COFO welcomed the results of an independent evaluation report on "*Silva Mediterranea*".¹⁰

(b) At its 23rd Session, in 2016, COFO recognized the valuable role of the RFCs in helping to set priorities for the FAO programme in forestry and recognized the continued role and relevance of ACSFI as a mechanism to channel private sector knowledge and solutions into the FAO Forestry Programme.¹¹

(c) At its 24th Session, in 2018, COFO encouraged FAO and Member Nations to further mainstream the outcome of the RFC meetings into the Regional Conferences, and encouraged FAO to explore options for linking the work of the RFCs to other policy areas and working groups in order to strengthen attention to forest issues in FAO Regional Conferences. COFO also recommended deeper collaboration between RFCs and the UNFF.¹²

(d) At its 25th Session, in 2020, COFO requested FAO to support increased involvement of RFCs in preparations for UNFF technical sessions and to invite RFCs to review UNFF related subjects. COFO also reiterated the need for RFCs to have a more policy-relevant role in the FAO Regional Conferences. In addition, COFO encouraged the ACSFI and the IPC to consult it on their work, and encouraged the FAO Forestry Division to share frequent updates of the work of the ACSFI and the IPC with Members.¹³

¹⁰ Paras 63, 83 & 89 COFO/2014/REP

¹¹ Para 43 & 45, COFO/2016/REP

¹² Paras 19a, 26a, 26b & 35d, COFO/2018/REP

¹³ Paras 33d, 33e, 34, 37c, 37d, 38d, & 38e, C 2021/24

ANNEX 1**Possible guiding questions for discussion.**

The following questions are intended to help stimulate discussion by the Commission.

Issues for considering future options for the work of Statutory Bodies:

- **Relevance** – extent to which they meet the needs of FAO and its Members in providing a platform to discuss regional forest-related issues; focus on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Strategic Framework of FAO (2022-31); contribution to international processes and goals, including to the Regional Conferences;
- **efficiency** – what benefits do Statutory Bodies bring in terms of policy dialogues, technical exchanges and contributing to their Members’ goals, timelines of decision-making based on meeting discussions and reports; links to FAO’s reforms; quality of documentation, etc;
- **effectiveness** – how useful are the Statutory Bodies in formulating and implementing policy and in studying and reporting on technical matters; role and contribution to performance in the context of the FAO Strategic Framework (2022-31).

Possible elements for consideration could include:

- (a) **Governance of Statutory Bodies:**
 - (i) Arrangements for electing Executive Committees and their roles.
 - (ii) Executive Committees’ links with other Governing Bodies, the Regional Conferences.
 - (iii) Servicing the Statutory Bodies through their secretariats (e.g. consider Secretaries of RFCs and other Regional Commissions as standing members of the Secretariats of Regional Conferences).
- (b) **Participation by Members and stakeholders in the work of the Statutory Bodies**
 - (i) Levels of participation in meetings of Statutory Bodies (e.g. do participants offer the necessary range of skills, experience and seniority in order to ensure that discussions be based upon a sound understanding of the policy context and technical considerations? Is there a good balance in terms of maintaining continuity of commitment to the Statutory Bodies, while also having turnover in membership to bring new ideas and insights?).
 - (ii) Engagement with stakeholders who are not Members of the Statutory Bodies, including other regional and sub-regional bodies and processes, civil society, research institutes, and the private sector.
- (c) **Agenda, format and timing of meetings**
 - (i) Arrangements for setting the agendas of meetings, alignment with the priorities identified by FAO Governing Bodies.

- (ii) Balance between policy-related and technical discussions.
- (iii) Involvement of RFCs in UNFF-related regional dialogues, in the review of UNFF-related subjects and in preparations for UNFF technical sessions.
- (iv) Cycle of meetings and how the timing fits with the cycle of other meetings, including Regional Conferences.
- (v) Following experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, how use could be made of technologies for virtual meetings, including implications for the periodicity and length of physical meetings.