

Opening Statement

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Distinguished experts, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and privilege for me to welcome you to Finland and Kotka. For the fifth time within twenty years the name of this town will be linked to the FAO Expert Consultation on Global Forest Resources Assessment. I am convinced, that the whole Finnish forest sector is both happy and proud to provide this repeated input for a work that always has always been looked upon as crucial for the enhancement of the basic prerequisites for sustainable forest management.

It is good to see so many specialists convening for an event like this, where a new starting point is being created for the next FRA. Your input will have direct and deep influence upon the outcome and quality of the national inventories and the final global inventory results.

The FAO's mandate in forest resources assessment is not only laid down in the articles of the FAO Constitution, but also in more specific guidance given e.g. by the Committee on Forestry meetings. In 1990 COFO recommended, "that FAO maintain a permanent capability to provide information on the state of forest resources worldwide on a continuing basis". Last year the Committee on Forestry requested FAO to strengthen its activities in the areas of monitoring, assessment and reporting on forests and to intensify assistance to countries for activities in these areas.

I believe, that the role and importance of reliable and high quality inventory data at global, national and sub-national or local level is self-evident for all participants here at the Kotka consultations. However, it is encouraging to note, that the efforts to improve the forest resources assessment work has also lately been given high political support. At the same time the overall, holistic forest policy role of FAO has been strongly emphasized. I would like to refer to the Ministerial Meeting on Forests held last year in Rome. The Statement of the Ministerial Meeting, adopted by 126 countries and the European Union, called on FAO to continue "to work with other international organizations and to play a leading role to facilitate the international forest policy dialogue by clarifying the contribution of forests to sustainable development, and to provide high quality, easily accessible global information related to forests and sustainable forests management"

One of the underlying reasons for having long-standing Finnish support for the forest resources assessment work is our own historical experience, which reveals the crucial importance of forest inventories, national forest programmes and policies for improving the work and performance of forestry and related forest industries. Let me just refer to the opening speech delivered by the Finnish Prime Minister in the Ministerial Meeting in Rome in March last year.

In Metsähallitus, which is responsible for all state owned land and waters in Finland, I have seen the tremendous importance of good resource information and efficient planning systems on a local level. We have put a lot of effort into improving this basic infrastructure for the sustainable management of state forests. These application systems for resources information and management planning have evolved into indispensable, everyday working tools. In comparison with other countries, companies and organisations with similar technical solutions we judge our systems to be both advanced and competitive. Let me therefore, present the basic structure our forest resource and

planning system. However, most of this part of my speech I will not go through, but leave to read for those of you who are interested in this topic.

Forest Resource Information and Natural Resource Management Planning

The information of the land area is stored in a geographical information system in several information layers. The layers have many types of information: ownership boundaries, land use classification, forest resource information, topographic maps and aerial photographs. The most important information layer is the forest resource information which forms the basis for both long term resource management planning and for practical operations.

The structure of *the forest resource information is based on forest compartments* with natural boundaries that are defined by several factors like tree species, age of trees, soil type or treatment history. Forest inventory is done using the commonly applied method in Finland which is ocular assessment assisted by systematic measurements of basal area, mean diameter on breast height (dbh), mean height and age. The individual inventory units are called compartments varying in size from half a hectare to tens of hectares. Information is updated continuously so that the database can be used for planning at any time. After a forest management activity such as thinning or regeneration new data concerning the compartment is collected and entered in to the system. Data is collected by the regional forest management staff. There is no separate inventory unit in Metsähallitus. The growth of the trees is updated annually using the growth functions and software developed by the Finnish Forest Research Institute (FFRI).

The forest resource information of protected areas is also stored in the same system. During the past years the information structure of the system has been developed to more efficiently serve the needs of the management of protected areas. Also, the information needs of landscape ecological planning of commercial managed forests have been introduced into the system. It is now possible to store detailed information of threatened species, decaying wood, biotopes, shrub layer etc. Currently there are more than 100 different data fields that can be used for storing the information of one compartment.

A natural resource management plan is compiled for each of the seven forestry regions of Metsähallitus. A plan covers an area of several hundreds of thousands of hectares of productive forest land. Planning is done in a transparent participatory process. Many stakeholders like regional authorities, NGO's and representatives of the business sector are invited to take part in the work. In the planning several land use scenarios are prepared and analysed. The weight put on commercial forestry, conservation and recreation varies a lot between the scenarios. Then, a scenario or an overall synthesis of scenarios which best fills the needs of Metsähallitus and stakeholders is chosen as a basis for the plan. The key information source in the planning is the forest resource database of Metsähallitus. The forest resource information is used in the planning for producing the cutting budgets needed for the quantitative analysis of the scenarios. In order to confirm the validity of the resource information, one cutting budget calculation is produced by using sample plot data from the National Forest Inventory (NFI) compiled by the FFRI. The key results of the planning process are the land use scheme for the coming 10 years and the respective sustainable annual cut.

An analysis of the landscape ecology of the planning area is included in the natural resource planning process. As a result of this analysis, the network of totally protected forest areas is complemented by maintaining important structural elements in the commercially managed forests. In 2005, a total of 246 000 hectares of forest land with specific ecological values had been set aside from commercial forest activities. This corresponds to roughly 5 % of the total commercially

managed forest area. In addition, another 5 % of the forest area is under restricted management in order to enhance biodiversity and to maintain scenic values of the forests. These allocations in ecological sustainability and also in the recreational value of the forests are much more than the Forest Act and the Nature Protection Act would require Metsähallitus to do. However, a general consensus prevails that the state owned forests must play a significant role in conserving ecological values.

In addition to the example of the state enterprise I would like to mention the National Forest Programmes as the most typical case where good quality inventory data is needed. There is a strong symbiosis between these two concepts. The national forest inventories have actually been widely used for forest policy purposes. Increment and silviculture goals attached to the Finnish forest inventories in fact altogether served as a kind of national forest programmes.

In Finland, the NFP process has gained from having a sub-national programme element added to the nation-wide forestry programme. The Finnish NFP 2010 is supplemented by 13 separate regional forestry programmes, that clearly have stimulated the formulation and implementation of the NFP. One pre-requisite for elaborating regional NFPs is the opportunity to use up-dated inventory data for the regions concerned. The FFRI has been able to provide the regions with continuously improved extracts from the national inventory data base.

International forest policy issues

After these national examples, let me conclude by coming back to some global forestry issues. First of all, forests would deserve more attention than they get today. Forests represent significant contribution to the eradication of hunger and poverty. Forests could and should be better recognized in strategies and programmes aiming at poverty alleviation and enhancement of sustainability. Renewable resources and especially forests are globally growing more important than before, because of reasons linked to energy, food and fodder supply, and to environmental protection. Additionally, governments have given their commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and ministers responsible for forestry have committed themselves to improve coordination of forest policies in order to enhance the contribution of sustainable forest management to the fulfilment of these goals. No doubt, there seems to be a good starting point for strengthening the role of forestry in creating more welfare.

If there is scarce or low quality data on a renewable resource, it is hard to plan for a better future. I already emphasized the importance of strengthening the regional, national and global databases on forest and tree resources. This is a long-term priority task, as laid down in several strategic FAO documents, and it has to remain one of the core competences of FAO.

There is a close connection between resources assessment and institutional strengthening. The need to give further support to national programmes is obvious. I find tasks such as initiating and elaborating NFPs, and also supporting the implementation of NFPs with instruments like the NFP facility, very much worth continuing and improving. However, there are other medium-term global forestry issues of equal importance. For example, the technologies and methodologies for sustainable management and conservation of the forests should be continuously improved. Best practices codes and the implementation of criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of forests are valuable tools in strengthening the technical foundation for forest resource conservation.

To me, the FAO Mission and Goals in Forestry are easy to understand and support. Above all, the sentence “ the contribution of trees and forests to sustainable land use, food security and to economic and social development and cultural values at national, regional and global levels maximised” describes in a nutshell the holistic and cross-sectoral approach adopted by FAO.

From the point of view of working world-wide, it is most important to recognize, that FAO in the field of forestry strives to establish and strengthen partnerships not only with Member Governments. In order to be able to address all global forestry issues adequately FAO seeks to build strong partnerships with universities, research centres and other institutions, with international organizations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector, including industry.

In this context, I want to mention the Collaborative Partnership on Forests CPF. CPF consists of 14 major international organizations, institutions and convention secretariats. It supports the work of UNFF, the United Nations Forum on Forests, and its member countries. FAO is chairing the CPF activities that include four Joint Initiatives. One of them is GFIS, the Global Forest Information Service. GFIS contributes to the objectives of the CPF by creating a common platform for forest-related institutions to describe and share information using common standards. This exercise is based on global collaboration between FAO and several other international organizations. Collaboration has been especially intensive with IUFRO, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations.

Dear participants, I would like to thank you for your attention and wish all of you a most successful meeting in Kotka and a pleasant stay in Finland.