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FOOD AND
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ORGANIZATION
OF THE
UNITED NATIONS

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Our Ref.: FORM - FO 14/2 (22)
x FO 14/4-5-6

Your Ref.:

20 August 2004

Dear Colleagues,

Guidelines for Working Party Report and Preparation of Programme of Work

The preparation of the 22nd Session of the IPC is progressing fast, thanks to the efforts of the Organizing Committee in Chile and Argentina and to the Secretariat at the FAO. Almost 150 contributions have been offered and their screening by the Scientific Committee is in its final stages. All seems to ensure that we shall have a really interesting meeting.

As is usual and unique to IPC Sessions, people from science, industry, agriculture and public administration will convene around very special trees, as poplars and willows undoubtedly are, creating the condition for the effective transfer of scientific progress into innovation and widespread application.

The main reasons for writing today are to:

- Emphasize the role that the Working Parties (WP) have in this process and the expectations that the IPC and FAO have on their action;
- Propose a common format for reporting the activity of the last two years to the Executive Committee;
- Stimulate a discussion within the WPs on their relevance, function, objectives, organization;
- Encourage the preparation of a realistic action plan for the next two-four years period that should be discussed during IPC-2004 and presented to the Commission.

1. The role of the Working Parties

The mission of FAO in forestry: "to enhance human well-being through support to member countries in the sustainable management of the world's trees and forests". This should not sound as a distant message: the IPC is a Statutory Body of FAO, included in its Forestry Committee and the mission of FAO is our own.

FAO furthermore indicates three goals in forestry:

- Maximize 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;
- Conservation, sustainable management and improved utilisation of trees and forest systems and their genetic resources;
- Increase in world-wide access to reliable and timely forestry information.

To the Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons and Secretaries of the
Working Parties of the International Poplar Commission

cc: Members of the Executive Committee of the
International Poplar Commission

In order to better appreciate the forestry policy of the FAO and thus tune the action of the WPs accordingly, you may wish to read the FAO Strategic Plan for Forestry, available on the Web at the following address:

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/webview/forestry2/index.jsp?siteId=1200&sitetreeId=1960&langId=1&geoId=0>

The specific functions of the IPC are stated in the Convention, available at

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/webview/forestry2/index.jsp?siteId=1580&sitetreeId=3700&langId=1&geoId=0>

These functions are:

- Study the scientific, technical, social and economic aspects of poplar and willow cultivation;
- Promote the exchange of ideas and material among research workers, producers and users;
- Arrange joint research programmes;
- Stimulate the organization of congresses and study tours;
- Report and make recommendations to the Conference of FAO;
- Make recommendations to NPCs and Governments through FAO.

Within this framework the Working Parties operate, on several occasions properly described as “the life and blood of the IPC”. Ideas and their implementation depend on the effort of the broad community of people that work with and for poplars and willows worldwide, and particularly to the persons, like you, that have offered to dedicate part of your time to the coordination of such effort.

Your contribution is particularly appreciated as it is entirely voluntary and the main reward is the intellectual satisfaction of accomplishing an invaluable service to the rest of the community, with special benefits to the development of less favoured parts of the world.

Therefore, the aim of the IPC, of its Executive Committee and of the Secretariat is to make sure that the Working Parties operate to the best of their abilities particularly in supporting the National Poplar Commissions of the 37 member countries and to other countries with Poplar and Willow resources. Additionally, Working Parties and the IPC, if working effectively can provide policy and implementation inputs to the Committee on Forestry (COFO) and the Council of FAO for consideration in their formulation of their programmes of work.

2. Report of Working Party activity to the Executive Committee

As usual, the WPs will report on the activity of the previous two years to the Executive Committee that will convene in Santiago 28 November, this year. It is suggested that the Chair and Vice-Chairs/Technical Secretaries should start working on the report, which does not need to be extensive, but clear and factual.

The following structure is suggested:

- i) WP denomination / Activity Report September 2002-November 2004
- ii) Officials in charge (Chair, vice-Chairs/Technical Secretaries, including changes during the reporting period)
- iii) Foreword (if needed)
- iv) Activities and outputs programmed at IPC-2000
A) B) ... C) ...
- v) Activities and outputs achieved ...
A) B) ... C) ...
- vi) Difficulties encountered and corrections suggested
- vii) Other comments

3. Discussion on the role of the Working Party

The 41st Executive Committee, held in Rome, September 2002 made several recommendations referring to the Working Parties. The full report of the meeting can be found at:

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/webview/forestry2/index.jsp?siteId=1580&sitetreeId=3700&langId=1&geoId=0>

A summary of the most relevant points:

- The Working Parties of IPC should be reviewed, rationalized and refocused to more effectively integrate with, and complement, the objectives, outputs, activities, resources and mechanisms of FAO, Committee on Forestry, Forestry Department, Regional Forestry Commissions, Statutory Technical Bodies in Forestry; and National Poplar Commissions.
- At the Twenty-second Session of the IPC the Working Parties should hold a joint meeting **to discuss the relevance and integration of their programmes of work and to evaluate and rationalize how best to serve member States and National Poplar Commissions**. This could result in abolition or merging of existing Working Parties and/or formation of new Working Parties, to be recommended to the members of the IPC meeting in plenary.

Attention is drawn, in particular, to the last statement. To put the matter in other words, with the risk of oversimplification, Working Parties (subsidiary bodies, in general) are established, if and when and as long as the IPC feels that there is a need for coordinated action in a specific area to help the Commission in fulfilling its functions (listed previously).

A frank and open discussion should be engaged within and among Working Parties on the need for their existence, the relevance of their objectives, the actual possibilities for producing tangible results, their optimal structure and organization. The idea is that the debate should again start among and between the Chairs/Vice-Chairs/Technical Secretaries in the period before IPC-2004 and be brought to a broader audience in Santiago. The programme of IPC-2004 will ensure that time is apportioned for this effort that the IPC and FAO itself consider of the highest importance.

A useful suggestion: a SWOT analysis of the Working Party could be a good starting point. For those who are not familiar with it, a few words of explanation on this simple technique:

One prepares a table divided in 4 boxes as follows:

Strength • ... • ...	Weakness • ... • ...
Opportunity • ... • ...	Threat • ... • ...

and simply makes a list in each box of elements that represent factors of strength, opportunity, weakness and threat (hence the acronym) for the operational capacity of the WP. The SWOT provides a useful foundation on which to analyze the lessons learned and to detail the solutions in the way forward.

The SWOT table should be complemented by a second one more focused on real experience from the past and ideas on how to progress in the future:

Lessons learned • ... • ...	The way forward • ... • ...
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4. Programmes for the future

Another of the recommendations of the Executive Committee with regard to the Working Parties:

- To be more transparent and accountable, and to assist in the review process, Working Parties were requested to **prepare a two year programme of work to detail focused but achievable activities, assign persons responsible, detail indicative delivery dates** and show linkages and collaboration with FAO, Forestry Department, Forestry Commissions and other agencies and institutions in particularly meeting the needs of developing countries.

A programme of work to define the objectives, outputs, activities and inputs is the natural consequence of a positive conclusion on the need for the Working Party and of a more focused definition of its mission and terms of reference.

What the IPC and FAO aim at is realism in the definition of objectives and commitment to their accomplishment. The main word of the above recommendation is “achievable”.

To quote a popular “project management” handbook, the objectives must be **SMART**, that is: **Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic** and **Time bounded**

It is therefore suggested that, again with a discussion that starts before, and is continued during IPC-2004, each WP produce a SMART programme of work for the coming years. The idea is to outline the work to be carried out until IPC-2008 and detail the two years until the 43rd Executive Committee Meeting scheduled for the year 2006.

Among the many tools that the WPs can exploit attention is drawn to two in particular:

- The IPC Website <http://www.fao.org/forestry/ipc> that has grown dramatically in the last couple of years, thanks to the efforts of the Secretariat;
- Working papers published by the FAO on specific subjects.

Both are easily updated, published and disseminated once the inputs/outputs from the Working Parties and their members is available and can have a very widespread and rapid outreach in the languages of the IPC. The IPC web site, in particular, already has space reserved for the Working Parties that can be enlarged to include the IPC 2004 analysis and report for your Working Party, including objectives, outputs, activities and inputs for the past and future planning periods.

The aim is to have the report of past achievements and a draft vision for the future forwarded to the Chairman and Secretary by the 1 November, 2004.

Thank you in anticipation of your kind collaboration in these tasks.

Yours sincerely,



Stefano Bisoffi
Chairman
International Poplar Commission



Jim Carle
Secretary
International Poplar Commission