

COFO26: Australia's draft interventions – 30/9/22

Item 4 State of the World's Forests 2022: Forest pathways for green recovery and building inclusive, resilient and sustainable economies (COFO/2022/2)

Thank you Chair, distinguished representatives and delegates, and the secretariat for the significant organisation that has gone into this important session. It is a pleasure to be here for the first in-person COFO meeting in four years.

Australia congratulates the FAO on the 2022 edition of the *State of the World's Forests* Report and supports the three identified pathways for recovery. These draw out the multiple contributions of forests towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Global Forest Goals. Importantly, they balance conservation, restoration and production outcomes.

However, we recognise that the path to achieving Agenda 2030 is challenging and, in this regard, Australia again condemns Russia's unprovoked, unjust and illegal invasion of Ukraine. The invasion is a gross violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. It is exacerbating already challenging timber supply and legality issues and impacting forest-dependent peoples and wildfire containment. We again call for an immediate cessation of violence, and the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, consistent with the legally binding decision of the International Court of Justice.

We appreciate the work of SOFO22 in highlighting the carbon potential of both forests and forest products, and the greatly increasing demand from construction and biofuel sectors in coming years. We strongly encourage the FAO to maintain focus on meeting the growing forest product demand through initiatives such as Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World.

Australia recognises the vital importance of forest-dependent peoples for the knowledge they bring to forest management, as highlighted by SOFO22. Australia's Indigenous peoples have a rich understanding of our environment and longstanding knowledge of caring for our country, including through the use of fire to protect, restore and regenerate forests. This valuable knowledge has been incorporated into forest and fire management regimes across Australia. It is used to improve carbon abatement in our savannahs and generate government-issued carbon credits - a further example of the evolving results-based payment approaches highlighted in SOFO22.

Finally, Australia highlights the importance of applying consistent and agreed language in FAO documents. In particular, we emphasise that the term 'sustainable' rather than 'green' should be used in the COFO report regardless of its use in SOFO22. This will ensure alignment with the language used in the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 as well as reflect language typically used in negotiated multilateral forums on forestry matters.

Thank you.

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Item 5 Forests and sustainable production of wood and non-wood forest products - meeting demands and supporting resilient local economies (COFO/2022/3)

Thank you Chair. Australia notes and supports the suggested actions by the Committee.

Australia highlights the importance of a strong global focus on increasing sustainable production, increasing wood product innovation, and facilitating sustainable trade and consumption, to meet this century's forest product demands. Further, and as outlined in the SOFO, the opportunity to reduce carbon emissions by 0.9 kilograms each time a kilogram of sustainable wood displaces an alternative material, will only be realised through dedicated global efforts.

The supply and demand shocks experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of ensuring sustainable trade and resilient supply chains. We know that when forest products are in short supply, they are often substituted with less sustainable resources, which can have serious consequences in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and environmental effects.

Within Australia, we have a strong mix of policies focused on expanding our production forests, encouraging innovation in our wood processing sector, and encouraging the use of mass timber in commercial buildings. This includes low-interest financing, grants and carbon credit schemes.

Within our region we are supporting improved market access for our Pacific neighbours on key agricultural products, including timber through the PHAMA+ program.

In this regard, Australia is highly supportive of FAO's ongoing efforts, including under the CPF's Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World initiative. We note that COFO22 paper 3 highlights several successes within Africa, and we would welcome further efforts within the Pacific region. We would also like to see actions for the Sustainable Wood initiative which are yet to occur, such as the 'ReplaceWithWood' social media campaign, realised in the near term, and strong engagement with the commodity body of the CPF, the International Tropical Timber Organization.

Australia welcomes the Ministerial Call on Sustainable Wood from this year's World Forestry Congress. We continue to reiterate the importance of recognising sustainable wood's carbon benefit, including from embodied carbon, and going forward, request this be included in the development of the Action Plan for FAO's Strategy on Climate Change. We believe it is important to reiterate this messaging beyond forest policy circles to ensure sustainable forest products play their full role as we transition towards building more circular economies.

Finally, Australia has been among global leaders at moving to regulate trade in legally harvested timber products. We are currently pursuing comprehensive reforms to strengthen our regulatory framework and have welcomed the cooperation from many other nations who have shared their lessons learnt.

Thank you.

Item 6 Agriculture and forestry linkages (COFO/2022/4)

Thank you Chair.

Australia largely supports the suggested actions to strengthen engagement and coordination between the agriculture and forest sectors; to better address deforestation, land degradation and biodiversity; and to promote integrated landscape management approaches.

Australia considers that sustainable and resilient production systems depend on a biodiverse and well-managed natural resource base, including forests. We advocate for a natural resource management approach where farmers and land managers, as environmental stewards, have an essential role in protecting and rehabilitating our natural resources.

As highlighted by the FRA2020 Report, Australia recorded the second largest increase in forest area in the previous decade. This reflects the strong efforts by government and the private sector to improve the integration of agriculture and forest management practices for biodiversity and carbon outcomes under a range of initiatives. Australia also recently announced the creation of a biodiversity certificate scheme, which will complement our carbon-crediting scheme to provide further incentives for landholders to undertake land restoration and management.

Australia welcomes international ambition on tackling the key drivers of deforestation from the agricultural sector and supports the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration in this regard. We encourage those looking at demand-side measures to engage with producer nations like Australia, both through multilateral fora and directly, to ensure that they are designed in a way that minimises burden for both countries and landholders that are successfully managing their forests, particularly smaller-scale producers. However, we are concerned that the critical ability for countries to flexibly implement definitions under used FRA or UNFCCC reporting, in accordance with their own national circumstances, may be unworkable under a harmonisation approach. We would welcome further detail on these technical aspects and highlight that demand-side measures should not detract from other efforts to tackle deforestation, including Turning the Tide initiatives.

On mainstreaming biodiversity across both agriculture and forestry, we highlight that the 'sparing' approach – where certain land is intensively-managed to free up other land for biodiversity - is an important approach to accommodate under the FAO's Action Plan, alongside 'sharing' approaches such as agroforestry. This is especially the case for the many countries that have reduced native forest logging, and need to meet growing wood demand from less land.

Finally, Australia notes that as we further integrate agriculture and forestry globally, the corresponding FRA categories will need updating to better capture land spanning both uses. For example, large Australian farms integrating native grassland grazing and forest management do not fit well under the existing categories.

Thank you.

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Item 7.2 Forests Fires and the Global Fire Platform (COFO/2022/5.2)

Thank you Chair.

Australia supports the suggested actions and recommendations outlined in paper 5.2. In particular, we emphasise the importance of fire-management strategies, tailored to specific regional and ecological circumstances.

Australia underscores the point that not all fires are harmful and, in many ecosystems, fire performs a key role in recycling nutrients, and stimulating regeneration. For example, many Australian ecosystems have evolved to require fire for natural regeneration. In addition, fire is used as a management tool to control extreme wildfire events, as a fuel reduction mechanism.

Under our Emissions Reduction Fund, Australia has had success implementing fire management projects to reduce the frequency, intensity and extent of late dry season fires in savannas, typical in northern Australia. The projects result in fewer greenhouse gas emissions and more carbon being sequestered in dead organic matter. Recognising Indigenous land management techniques, we are providing economic returns to Indigenous communities who manage the land with these methods through results-based payments.

From experience with our fire-prone vegetation, Australia has developed strong knowledge and expertise in wildfire management. We frequently contribute to international initiatives to further skills and expertise, as well as exchanging firefighting personnel. We are happy to share further information and collaborate with interested parties.

In closing, Australia takes this opportunity to again thank other nations for the strong support we received during our 2019/2020 bushfires that burnt some 8.2 million hectares of our forests. We look forward to showcasing some of the recovery efforts when we host the Asia Pacific Forestry Commission in 2023.

Thank you.

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Item 8.3 Global Forest Resources Assessment and Remote Sensing Survey 2021-2022

(COFO/2022/6.3) & (COFO/2022/INF/6)

Thank you Chair.

Australia would like to congratulate the FAO on the success of FRA 2020, and in particular, the greatly improved, intuitive online reporting platform for uploading country data and subsequent querying. We support the suggested actions by the Committee and FAO, particularly in regards to the continued harmonisation of these methods and definitions for forest data collection.

Australia is a firm believer in the 'report once, use many times' approach. It was positive to see FRA data being used as the basis for several reporting processes, including the UNFF Global Forest Goals Report 2021 and within reporting for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Australia welcomes the progress the FAO have made over the past 20 years towards improved reporting accuracy, including the development of the remote sensing survey, and encourage its continuation for future FRA cycles. Australia sought to support this process by hosting a workshop in 2020, however COVID-19 unfortunately prevented this from proceeding.

We support the work of the CPF on developing the Global Core Set and welcome further development to tier 3 indicators. Australia would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the FRA team to prepare papers and convene the recent *Online Expert Consultation on FRA2025*. We highlight that the ambitious FRA work program is one of many reporting commitments and does not necessarily align with country processes – this can present a challenge for some countries to meet FRA timelines. We look forward to the next steps in progressing the FRA 2025 work program.

Australia has been a key supporter of recent FAO work on primary forest reporting, including hosting the *International Expert Workshop on Improving reporting on Asia-Pacific primary forests*, in 2021. We highlight the value of this process to ensure regional perspectives are understood in developing technical parameters around primary forest reporting.

Similar to the primary forest reporting work, Australia would like to suggest the FRA undertake additional work to look at the 'degradation' definition, taking into account regional perspectives, noting that degradation is much more scientifically and politically complex, compared with primary forests.

Finally, with the growing drive to encourage agriculture and forestry linkages, Australia also highlights the need for FRA to consider how current definitions could better capture land spanning both uses.

Thank you.