

Monday 28th September

Item 4: State of the World's Forests 2026: Restoring forests and landscapes - the way forward for a sustainable future

Thank you, Chair.

It is a pleasure to be [back] at the Committee on Forestry, and I thank the Secretariat for its work in preparing this session.

The United Kingdom welcomes the 2026 State of the World's Forests report and its focus on restoring forests and landscapes as a priority alongside protecting standing forests.

As the UK Foreign Secretary said at the United Nations General Assembly last week, climate change and nature loss are urgent national security issues, requiring us to change how we assess risk, strengthen our resilience to shocks and act together internationally.

Forests are central to that meeting that challenge. They are critical natural infrastructure: regulating climate and water systems, sustaining food production, supporting livelihoods and underpinning economic prosperity. Investing in their protection, restoration and sustainable management is therefore both an environmental imperative and a strategic investment in resilience, development and economic growth. That is why the UK is pleased to have recently announced our intention to invest up to £400 million through a loan in the Tropical Forests Forever Facility, mobilising long-term finance to keep tropical forests standing.

SOFO 2026 reinforces the urgency of investing in forests. We welcome its emphasis on restoration quality, not just scale, and support efforts to move beyond area-based targets for tree planting towards measures that better capture ecological integrity, resilience and social outcomes. We would welcome further information on the timeline for developing these indicators and on efforts to improve consistency across reporting frameworks and definitions.

We also welcome the report's recognition of the risks associated with rising demand for wood products and the expansion of poorly planned and unsustainable monocultures. Meeting growing demand for wood products is essential to the transition to more sustainable economies, but this must be achieved through sustainable forest management and circular bioeconomy approaches. Well-located and sustainably managed planted forests have an important role to play alongside the protection of natural and primary forests.

The UK seeks to strike this balance through multi-purpose forestry, which includes sustainable timber production alongside the delivery of other ecosystem services, including strong protections for ancient woodland and other irreplaceable habitats. As the new Decade for Afforestation and Restoration begins, we would be keen to understand whether FAO is considering guidance to help Members achieve this balance in practice, including on species selection and biosecurity.

Finally, we would encourage FAO to build implementation of the new Decade around existing reporting arrangements, avoiding unnecessary new burdens and strengthening coherence across forest, climate and biodiversity commitments.