



INSIGHTS INTO SWEDEN'S FORESTS: EVENT REPORT

Sweden holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) until July 2023, at a time when the EU is discussing several forest related files. To consider what this may mean for forests and forest policies, the [Swedish Society for Nature Conservation](#) (SSNC) and Fern organised the event '**Insights into Sweden's forests**' on 1 March 2023.

It was an opportunity to hear from people whose livelihoods depend on forests, including Swedish foresters and leaders from the Indigenous Sami communities.

All presentations are available [here](#).

A recording of the event is available [here](#).

PRESENTATIONS

The event began with a presentation from **Malin Sahlin**, policy officer for the Boreal Forest at SSNC. Malin shared her perspective that the lack of legal requirements in Swedish regulations means they are not strong enough to protect forest biodiversity.

She highlighted that **97 per cent of managed forests in Sweden are clearcut** and that **forests are getting younger and younger** (60 per cent of the Swedish forest is younger than 60 years). Since most of the forest is too young to harvest, this creates a large **pressure to log the old forest, especially in the Northern region which is high in biodiversity**. A striking fact was that **the forest growth has been declining**, compounded by the homogeneity of Swedish forests and its inability to deal with climate effects such as storms, insect infestations and drought.

She called for increased monitoring and reporting as well as incentives to shift to close-to-nature forestry.

This was followed by a presentation from **Anja Fjellgren Walkeapää**, a Sami Reindeer Herder with a Masters in Forest Ecology. She outlined the impact the Swedish Forestry model has on reindeer husbandry, the foundation of the Sami culture and explained that the internationally recognised legal human rights of the Sami were not respected in Sweden, mainly due to forestry. The practice of clear-cutting was heavily reducing areas where reindeer are able to graze for lichen, their main source of nutrition in the winter - there has been a 71 per cent decline in lichen-abundant forests over the last 60 years.

She called for a new type of forestry and Regulations to ensure it is followed.

Martin Jentzen, a forest engineer, drew on his long history of working within the forest industry. He has worked with the Swedish Forest Agency and also as a timber buyer. He pointed out that the orientation of the Swedish forestry legislation has **not changed in practice since the 1950s** and stated that due to the long-term negative trend in timber prices, there has been a focus on reducing costs, leading to **dependence on cheap labour and high mechanisation**.

As a forest owner, he talked about how reliant forest owners had become on the processing industry, both in developing forest management plans and actual harvesting. This gives forest owners little freedom to make alternative choices. The **stark reality is that the wood processing industry has to a large extent become the voice of the sector** and even the forest owners organisation is more industry-based, despite representing only one third of forest owners.

He called for a natural forest structure so as to improve forests' resilience and deliver higher quality timber that provides higher revenues.

Professor Sten B. Nilsson, an expert on boreal forests and global forest sector analysis, who has authored and co-authored some 400 scientific publications, spoke about his more than five decades of experience leading forest research institutions as well as advising governments on their forest policy, within and outside of Sweden. He stated that Sweden has nothing to gain from resisting EU policies that will improve forest management, but much to gain from engaging. He explained that the future forest sector will likely look very different and that Sweden must prepare for that.

He called for a more holistic forest policy, with sustainability benchmarks. You can read his full speech [here](#).

REACTIONS

We invited three Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to provide reactions to what they had heard.

Par Holmgren, Swedish MEP for the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, said it was problematic that we don't consider forests as ecosystems. People consider short-term profits as more important than ecological, social, and economic sustainability. Many smaller forest owners want to see a different way of forestry in Sweden but most of them are stuck in the current system. We also heard about the urgent need for a holistic view, and to accept that in the long run, ecology and economy are actually the same. Moving forward, politicians should agree on the big picture and have a constructive dialogue.

Emma Wiesner, Swedish MEP for the Renew Europe Group said that it is important to understand the many different types of forest in Sweden. With over 300,000 forest owners there are 300,000 different forestry practices, which makes it complicated to find a "one-size-fits-all" solution.

It is important to remember that forestry policy has traditionally belonged to Member States, and that this changes with the Commission's proposed new Regulation. This makes it complicated for forest owners (who have managed forests for generations) to adapt. It is positive that we are considering regulation but we need to consider the needs of forest owners.

Michal Wiezik, Slovakian MEP for the Renew Europe Group said that Slovakia has witnessed a collapse of its industrial forest model that was based on spruce plantations, which was not the best way to protect areas. They are now having a constructive dialogue and a strong distinction between productive and protected forest.

He explained his surprise at hearing that the EU and the Nordic countries are having similar discussions to those Slovakia used to have in 2004 as the forest sector was not properly reformed after the fall of communism. He questioned why so many arguments contrast with scientific facts. He stated that it is not the absence of facts that is the problem, but the denial of them.

His concern is that we are ignoring the fact that forests are not in a fit state to face the climate crisis. We have seen the collapse of forests in Slovakia, Czechia and Germany, and there is a strong risk that this will happen in the Nordic countries too.

Ion Codescu, Head of Unit Land Use and Management, DG Environment, European Commission emphasised that all interested stakeholders should all meet together and listen to what is happening on the ground. He said that despite being partial, the data shows that there are really problematic issues in forests, especially related to the climate crisis. This is why they developed the new Forest Strategy. He said that the EU is more than the Commission and that it has responsibility over forests, while respecting subsidiarity. He drew attention to the fact that protected forests under Natura 2000 have a poor status and that this worried many in the EU. He stressed it was important to listen to forest owners and talked about the importance of the EU Forest Monitoring and Strategic Planning proposal to better understand the state of forests. He finished by saying it is important to have indicators against which to measure progress, and to ask Member States to develop longer term plans as this is not about the EU doing the planning themselves.