MAKING THE EU WORK FOR PEOPLE & FORESTS

Europe's National Energy and Climate Plans 2030: Are they fit for purpose?

EU Member States' National Energy and Climate Plans are due to be published by the end of this year. It is critical that we get them right as they explain how we will achieve EU climate targets in the next 10 years. But such targets will be incredibly difficult to meet if the plans don't also increase biodiversity - the wide variety of plant and animal life our land and oceans support.

Forests are an essential part of both climate and biodiversity action

So, what should the plans include?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on Land was clear that **forests are an essential part of both climate and biodiversity action**. Despite this, a recent EU Commission report found that European forests are absorbing less carbon dioxide each year, and that the main reason "is the increase in harvesting rates."

To a large extent, this increased harvesting is due to perverse incentives based on faulty carbon accounting which encourage Member States to increase the amount of forest biomass they burn for energy.

The plans must therefore prioritise investment in real renewables and the protection and restoration of our best natural climate solution - forests.

Fern's analysis

To find out whether they are fit for purpose, Fern analysed the National Energy and Climate Plans of five Member States - Denmark, Germany, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden - as well as information from their National Forestry Accounting Plans.

We wanted to find out how transparent they are on four issues:

1. Source of wood for material and energy use
2. Ratio of wood for material versus energy use
3. The forests' ability to remove carbon from the atmosphere
4. Plans to protect forests and biodiversity

The results make for uncomfortable reading.

They reveal such a paucity of data that it is impossible to assess the climate, forest and biodiversity impact of each Member State's activities.

We urge Member States to work together to provide comprehensive information on all these points. That is the only way they can prove they are planning to take transparent, ambitious and sustainable action to meet climate goals.

Once we have the final plans we will re-evaluate them to analyse their climate impact.

SLOVAKIA

Slovakia is the fourth most forested country in the EU, with 40 per cent of its land covered in forests. But these forests are in danger. The Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) National Strategy for the Protection of Biodiversity to 2020 in Slovakia highlights "insufficient financing of elementary nature protection activities such as mapping, monitoring... and ensuring suitable management of protected areas."

© Wolf NGO Slovakia

What the Plans say about bioenergy:

- Wood will account for 75 per cent of total renewable energy for heating and cooling in 2030.[1]
- Wood used for electricity generation will increase by ten per cent from 2020-2030.[2]
- No information is given on where this biomass will come from (whether imported or domestic), the feedstock, nor the impact on biodiversity or the forests' ability to remove carbon dioxide.
- "In recent years, plants using combined heat and power technology have been rebuilding boilers to burn biomass with coal and building new boilers to burn biomass, and this trend will continue, although to a lesser extent".[3]

What the Plans say about Slovakia's forests:

- By 2030, the forest carbon sink will reduce by 1.2 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.[4]
- 23,000 hectares of agricultural land will be afforested between 2020 and 2030.[5]
- Harvesting will increase due to high level of old stands.[6] This is a continuing trend as harvesting increased from 46 per cent of forest growth in 1998 to 78 per cent of forest growth in 2017.[7]
- It does not outline the trajectory of emissions and removals, nor the source of biomass supply and its impact on the forests' ability to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. It states that the final version will include more information, so hopefully those gaps will be filled soon.

Additional information from other sources:

- **EUROSTAT** data shows that 44 per cent of Slovakia's total forest area falls within Natura 2000, but the area of forest under a "protective function" is only 18.2 per cent.

Scorecard

	Transparency	Climate impact
Source of wood for energy and material use	No information	*Pending official information*
Ratio of wood for energy versus material use	No information	*Pending official information*
Forests' ability to remove carbon from the atmosphere	Information provided	Dangerous: forest carbon sink will reduce by 1.5 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030
Forest protection and biodiversity	Information provided	Deadwood, natural regeneration and broadleaf species are increasing, and clearcutting is decreasing.

Conclusion

Slovakia must outline where its biomass will come from and how it will account for the climate and environmental impacts of biomass harvesting and burning. It must also propose a plan for improving the forest carbon sink.

1 NECP P. 41
2 NECP P. 39
3 NECP P. 152
4 NECP P. 142
5 NECP P. 140
6 NFAP P. 7
7 NFAP P. 41

Fern
Rue d'Edimbourg 26, 1050 Brussels
+32 2 894 46 90
www.fern.org

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the LIFE Programme of the European Union and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the funders.