



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.

SWEDEN

Forests cover 57 per cent of Sweden, making it one of Europe's most forested countries. But rather than seeing its forests as a resource to be treasured, Sweden pursues a forestry model centered around intensive management and exports.

What the Plans say about bioenergy:

- In 2015, 56 per cent of renewable energy was generated from biomass.¹ They state that this will remain at the same level in 2030 unless additional measures are taken.² Consumption of fossil fuel will also not decrease, unless additional measures are taken.
- "The supply of sustainable biomass from Swedish forests has an important role to play in the continued transition to a fossil free society".

What the Plans say about Sweden's forests:

- Although the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) considers forestry a driver of biodiversity loss in Sweden, the Plans provide no concrete data on how forestry impacts biodiversity.
- Forests' ability to remove carbon dioxide is projected to decrease by 15 million tonnes.³ 4.7 per cent of 'productive' forests are formally protected and 5.1 per cent are voluntarily set aside for protection.⁴ Rather than continuing



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with harvesting rates set in 2000-2009, the Forest Reference Level assumes an increase in harvesting where 100 per cent of the net annual biomass growth would be harvested, regardless of the age of trees. This means all areas of trees above 80 years old will decline.⁵

Additional information from other sources:

- The [5th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity](#) states: "The main threats to the forest and its species are to a large extent caused by the intensification of forestry during parts of the 20th century which has led to reduction of habitat connectivity and loss of specific habitat features, removal of dead and dying trees... Forest operations can have detrimental effects on the microclimate."

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: the forest carbon sink will decrease significantly in the next decade.
Forest protection and biodiversity	No information	Without this information it is not possible to say, but only 4.7 per cent of forests are formally protected.

Conclusion

Sweden must report on the sustainability of any harvesting and consider the impacts of its forest management on biodiversity and the natural carbon sink. It must include clear trajectories for bioenergy and be more transparent about how it will ensure sustainability of biomass, and the division of wood between material and energy uses.

1 NECP P. 55
 2 NECP P. 67
 3 NFAP P. 9
 4 NFAP P. 22
 5 NFAP P. 19 Figure 7