



For more information, please contact:
Fern: Hannah Mowat, +32 485 025 432,
hannah@fern.org
IEEP: Martin Nesbit, +44 207 340 2671,
mnesbit@ieep.eu

EU FORESTS AND LAND COULD HELP INCREASE CARBON-CUTTING AMBITION AT HOME

Paris (1 December 2015) – A report released today shows how the EU can include forests into its carbon cutting targets in a climate friendly way. Concerns had been raised earlier in the year that including land use, land use change and forests (LULUCF) – which is a net sink of emissions in the EU – could weaken the EU emission reduction target by at least three per cent, to less than 37 per cent (down from 40 per cent in relation to 1990).¹ Today’s report by IEPP, commissioned by Fern, shows that the EU can include LULUCF into its climate and energy target in a way that incentivises action in LULUCF without reducing ambition in other sectors. The report outlines how this can be achieved by a separate LULUCF pillar, with either targets for action by individual member states, or an EU-wide regime backed by regulation.

The EU has a target to reduce emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2030, which it has committed to achieving through action at home exclusively. IEPP’s report comes at a time when the EU is thinking through exactly how to integrate the EU’s land and forest sectors into its climate target rules. In early 2016, the European Commission will make a legislative proposal for how to do this.

Until now, the EU has decided not to account for LULUCF due to long-standing concerns that are unique to the sector, including the temporary nature of LULUCF mitigation and the fact that reductions in emissions are reversible; the complexities in setting a baseline from which to measure emissions; the difficulty in counting carbon in this sector accurately, and the large inter-annual variability in emissions and the long lead times needed for mitigation measures to take effect.

Martin Nesbit, lead author of the report at IEPP commented *“None of these issues mean LULUCF should be ignored. On the contrary, many foresters and EU member states are calling for forests to be part of the solution, and they have every reason to. What it means is that tailored approaches are needed, which is what we have tried to provide.*

Hannah Mowat, forest and climate campaigner at Brussels based forest organisation, Fern shared her organisation’s views: *“Most stakeholders, whether public authorities, businesses or NGOs don’t want the EU’s forests to be the scapegoat for industry emissions, and don’t want them to be used to delay the transition to a low carbon economy. They want forests to be a positive solution in their own right, and make their contribution to solving the climate crisis, without reducing ambition of other sectors. This can be good for biodiversity, such as through incentives for natural forest regeneration and good for the economy, such as incentives to increase the Harvested Wood Product Pool.”*

She continued: *“The window of opportunity to limit warming to two degrees, let alone 1.5 is getting smaller and smaller, so we need to both increase carbon sequestration in forests at the same time as transitioning to a low carbon economy. That’s why we support IEPP’s proposal for a separate pillar that could encourage positive action in EU forests. We urge the EU to study these proposals and support Member States and foresters that want their forests to be part of the solution.”*

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Report is available at: www.fern.org/LULUCFpillar

¹ Available at www.fern.org/LULUCF2030