



**14th Annual Conference, Warsaw, 14 - 16 September 2006 of the
European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory
Councils EEAC**

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**SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF NATURE'S
AND HUMANS' WELL-BEING**

Distinguished Audience,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to give a presentation in the 14th EEAC Annual Conference on Sustainable Forest Management. The issue of sustainable development is of utmost importance and it is a great honour for me to share the views on this issue today with you.

To begin with, it is important to define what is meant by sustainable forest management. The Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe took place in Helsinki, Finland in 1993. The conference defined sustainable forest management as:

"The stewardship and use of forests and forest land in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and potential to fulfil, both now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions". This needs to be done "at local, national and global levels and in a way that does not cause damage to other ecosystems".

Finland has received excellent ratings in several recent sustainability evaluations. To illustrate my topic I will describe our experience and practical approaches on sustainable forestry, forestry and forest industry and human well-being.



Sustainable Finnish forestry

Sustainable Finnish forestry forms the basis for the strong development of our forest industry. During the last five decades, the output of the Finnish forest industry has grown rapidly, whilst the composition of production has changed; technology has advanced and the sector has achieved a leading position internationally.

Within the span of fifty years, Finland has risen to rank as a world leader in technology and competence. Investment has created new capacity and maintained the competitiveness of forest industry.

The growth of Finnish forests exceeds the amount harvested

During this period the forests in Finland have been growing at a greater rate than the amount of wood used. Our forest resources have increased more than ever before since the Second World War. The total annual growth of Finnish forests is approximately 100 million cubic metres of which around 60 per cent is utilized each year. The volume of timber in Finland's forests increases by tens of millions of cubic metres every year.

This is very much due to the fact that two thirds of Finland's forests are owned by ordinary Finnish families. Over 60 per cent of the wood raw material that the industry uses is derived from family-owned forests.

The average size of the harvested areas in Finland is around two hectares. Forest owners who harvest the wood from their forests are duty bound to establish new stands to replace the trees felled within a period of five years. This obligation already appears in the first Finnish Forests Act of 1886, which makes this requirement one of the first of its kind in the world. The first protected forest areas were already designated about a century ago.

The most common method of forest renewal is planting new saplings. Around 160 saplings are planted in Finland every year and it takes approximately 80 years before the trees can be harvested. All of these saplings are native species, such as pine, spruce and birch.

Another way of renewing forests is to leave large trees standing at felling sites so that they provide the seeds for new trees. The climate and soil in Finland guarantees that forests also start to grow on their own and



independently spread to new regions. All planted stands also include trees of natural origin.

Sustainable forestry

During the last few decades great progress has been made in the Finnish forest management. The standard of the care and maintenance of the environment has been closely monitored over a period of ten years in both privately-held forests and in the forests owned by the forest industry. The increasing awareness of the significance of the care of nature in forestry over the past ten years has borne substantial fruit today.

The new approach has succeeded in safeguarding the unique environment of the forest and has adopted the selection of individual trees to remain in felled areas. This favourable trend has been influenced by forest legislation and forest certification in addition to the introduction of setting exams on nature management for forestry professionals in a nation-wide project.

Recently the recommendations for good forest management have come under revision. The objective of these new recommendations has been to improve the profitability of productive forestry whilst providing an impetus for the care of the environment and protection of watercourses. The revised recommendations have been drawn up in cooperation with forest owners, researchers and all stakeholders in the field.

Democracy in Finnish forestry

Democracy works well in Finnish forestry. In addition to the Finnish Forest Act and the Nature Conservation Act, the Finnish forestry is steered by a long-term National Forest Programme which sets out the basic procedures to be followed in forest policy up to the year 2010.

The point of departure in the programme is that forests must be developed as an economically, socially and ecologically sustainable entity. The review of the National Forest Programme is currently under way. This huge task is carried out together with the various stakeholders involved: forest owners, forest industry companies, workers in the sector, seven different ministries, forest research institutes, Government Forest Agency (Metsähallitus), environmental organisations, hunters and scouts. In the same way these stakeholders contribute to the planning, implementation and monitoring of the Regional Forest Programmes.



Biodiversity

Most of Finland's endemic forest species are found in our multi-functional forests. One of the ways in which the biodiversity of productive forests is protected is by preserving so called key biotopes. They are valuable forest habitats clearly distinct from their surroundings. Ensuring the welfare of key biotopes covering small areas in forests is indeed a precisely targeted way of protecting species. The law requires that key biotopes be spared felling.

In addition to the biodiversity is protected in productive forests by leaving both living trees and those that have died standing untouched on logging sites. These decaying and wildlife trees, as they are called, increase the structural diversity of forests and provide endangered species with nourishment and shelter.

The Forest Biodiversity Programme for Southern Finland

The compulsory protection of extensive areas of privately-owned forests would be prohibitively expensive and a very slow process. New conservation methods have therefore been devised which involve working together with landowners to preserve ecologically-valuable natural forest habitats.

The Forest Biodiversity Programme for Southern Finland is an integral part of Finland's implementation of various international agreements. The programme is based on the voluntary initiatives from land owners. The results have shown that this new approach is successful: forest conservation is proceeding faster than it would only by the means provided for it in the State budget.

Biodiversity of the Finnish forests is supported and studied also under several other large programmes, such as 'the Biodiversity and Monitoring Programme', the programme for 'Deficiently-Known and Endangered Species' and the research programme - 'Safeguarding Forest Biodiversity - policy instruments and socio-economic impacts' which was commenced last year.



With the means tested in these programmes, Finland completes the Natura 2000 network which has also been approved by the EU. This is the way Finland is fulfilling her international biodiversity commitments in order to stop the decline of species by the year 2010.

Forest conservation

Whilst Finland has a forest industry producing for a large export market, the country is also a European leader when it comes to strictly protected forests, which account for 7.2 per cent of the total forest area.

The protected forests in Finland cover an area half the size of Belgium. If all protected areas, including the peatlands and the farthest summits of the Arctic fells were added, the protected area would be greater than the size of Belgium.

All forestry activities are forbidden in strictly protected forests. In Finland, these include strict nature reserves and national parks, areas belonging to various protection programmes as well as the protected parts of wilderness areas. Programmes have been created to protect bogs, old growth forests, water fowl habitats, shoreline areas, deciduous forests and some other areas.

Forestry and Finnish forest industry

In order to safeguard the diversity of the nature in forests, the forest industry conducts a responsible wood acquisition policy in addition to providing training to its employees on issues related to forestry environment. Companies are utilising environmental and quality control systems in addition to management controls for the acquisition of wood to ensure that the care of the environment would be maintained at a high level. The forest industry also finances research in the forestry and forest diversity.

Finnish forest industry companies know the origin of their wood

Illegal timber and the problems arising from illegal logging have become a widely-discussed topic in international debate.

Finnish forest industry companies have been developing methods that aim to ensure the legal origin of wood since the 1990s. Tools to combat illegal logging include company-specific policies and principles, the creation of



long-term business relations with trustworthy suppliers, forest certification, environmental management systems, wood-tracing systems, training and increasing awareness through stakeholder dialogue.

The WWF and the Finnish Forest Industries Federation have recently agreed on a joint statement on the legal sourcing of wood. We share a joint view on the ultimate goal of legal and sustainable forest management and recognize illegal logging as a mutual concern worldwide whilst sharing a vision of an international timber trade with wood procured from legal and sustainable sources only.

WWF acknowledges the Finnish wood-tracking systems as one of the most efficient tools to support the legal sourcing of wood. The forest industry is committed to contributing to the further development of the existing tracing systems in local participatory processes and international dialogue in order to better identify and exclude different kinds of illegal activity and to increase the transparency of the systems.

Forest certification is a good tool

Forest certification has in recent years become a central and sometimes controversial topic in the international dialogue concerning forestry. For the forest industry, certification is a part of normal quality control and responsible corporate conduct.

Debate concerning the superiority of different certification systems has – to some extent already – adversely affected the use of wood products, even though wood is a renewable natural resource and has many positive environmental characteristics. If this development is not countered, the certification race will, in the long run, be won by competing materials, such as plastics, aluminium, steel and concrete.

Forest certification is a good way of demonstrating that the forests are managed well and in a sustainable way. The various certification systems aspire towards the same goal - sustainable forest management - but with slightly different emphases. At the moment, only about 7 per cent of the world's forests are certified. In Europe half of the forests have been certified, whilst in Finland the figure is 96 %.



The best way to promote forest certification and to reinstate it to its rightful position is to have several reliable certification systems available. This will make it possible for the forest owners to select the certification method best suited to local conditions. Competition between different standards/systems together with an open dialogue and scientific debate help to improve the quality of certification systems and speed up progress.

Human well-being

Finland lives from its forests

Without forestry, there would be no forest industry and without the forest industry there would be no forestry. The nature values of forests come into clearer focus when forests are used and assigned a financial value. Ecological, social and economic sustainability should not be seen as contradictory objectives but complementing each other.

In Finland the forest sector provides employment for around eight per cent of the Finnish workforce. Therefore, forestry is the key contributor to the Finnish welfare society - education, health care and social safety. In many areas the forest sector provides vital jobs that would be difficult to replace with any other kind of activity. These jobs make a substantial contribution to safeguarding the vitality and welfare of many rural areas.

Forests are for recreation

Another aspect of forest management in human well-being comes from the fact that the Finnish forests are multiple-use forests. Although forestry is practised it does not exclude other activities, such as picking berries, reindeer herding, hunting and recreation. There is a particular act in Finnish legislation that secures: 'everyman's right to the wilderness', where everyone is permitted access to the forests, to set up a campsite, or to pick berries and mushrooms, regardless of who owns the forest. Recreation in forests is very easy as we have built a comprehensive network of 'forest roads'.

Products made of wood

The second aspect of well-being based on sustainable forest management comes through the products that are made of wood. We are so used to them that we tend not to notice their importance in our everyday life. It would be hard to imagine a world without paper, newspapers and books,



packaging materials, tissue papers, wooden houses, furniture and wooden interior decoration.

Through centuries paper has been essential for education, information transmission, accumulation of knowledge, science and culture. Even today this holds true despite the emergence of electronic media and Internet.

Wood products help to mitigate greenhouse gases

Wood products play an important role in mitigating climate change by decreasing carbon from the atmosphere. Wood products also act as long-term stores of carbon. In addition, by increasing the use of renewable resources, such as wood, we can decrease the use of non-renewable fuels.

Growing trees store, on average, one tonne of carbon dioxide for each growing cubic metre of wood. At the same time they are generating 0.7 tonnes of oxygen. Forests that have been managed are more effective absorbers of carbon than forest regions that have been left in their natural state.

The forest area in Europe has increased in recent years, but forests in South America and Africa in particular are declining. Greenhouse gas emissions resulting from deforestation globally represent approximately one quarter of global emissions. This is one of the issues to be taken into the consideration when considering the future regime for mitigating climate change.

Wood is an energy-friendly material

The forest industry generates nearly half of its electricity itself. The wood chips that are a by-product of sawmilling are used as a raw material for pulp and particle board. The chemicals used in the pulp processing are recovered and re-used in the production process, whilst the wood components derived from the process are burned in bio energy plants to produce both electricity and heat. The wood products industry utilises by-products, like bark and other wood residues, as a fuel in bio energy plants.

Wood-based fuels account for around 75 per cent of the energy that its mills use. The forest industry generates some 80 percent of Finnish bio energy: both in the form of electricity and district heating. At 20 percent, bio energy accounts for a higher share of energy generation in Finland than in any



other European country. Most Finnish towns are heated by district heating generated by the forest industry.

Summary and conclusion

The fundamental idea of sustainable development lies in not exceeding the tolerance of nature. The ecological and social sustainability is as equally important as economic sustainability. Environmental organisations have done valuable work in opening debate, specifically on the ecological values of forests. It is also, however, equally important to consider other aspects of sustainability.

It would be difficult to think of a raw material more ecological than wood that has originated from a sustainably-managed forest. Saying that forests are an integral part of being Finnish means that forests are not only a source of livelihood but also a source of creative energy and inspiration.

The core issues concerning forests are not complicated. Forests regenerate. Forest is one of the dominating elements of European nature and European diversity. By making use of a wise combination of utilisation and protection, the forests will be preserved for future generations.

The European forest sector has set the goal of becoming a competitive and global technology leader with a key role in the promotion of sustainable development by 2030. It is important, that the emphasis in consumption will be shifted to renewable natural resources. Recyclable products - such as paper - made from wood, and which can be used to generate bio energy at the end of their life cycle, represent sustainable development at its best.

In accordance with its vision, the forest industry intends to continue to be a sector that prudently uses renewable raw material in a way that corresponds to the changing needs of environmentally- aware consumers. Finding broadly-acceptable solutions is not always easy but well worth the effort.