

# Global Forest Sector: Setting the Course for a Low Carbon Future

Renewed Policy Statements Call for Collective Action to Reach International Climate Action Through Sustainable Forestry and Forest Products

For Immediate Release

**January 28, 2022** – Earlier today, the International Council of Forest and Paper Associations (ICFPA) published three new policy statements defining the role that global forests and forest products can play in our collective pursuit for climate solutions.

Developed in collaboration by forest sector representatives from 28 countries around the world, the statements outline innovative solutions for governments and businesses to better leverage the carbon-capturing power of forests and forest products while supporting more sustainable economies across the globe.

“The global forest products sector is uniquely positioned to provide practical, low-carbon solutions that can help address the complex environmental and economic challenges of today,” said ICFPA President Derek Nighbor. “Climate policies that make use of the carbon capturing benefits of sustainable forest management, the innovative use of wood in the built environment, and the abundance of potential in the growing forest bioeconomy can help chart the course towards post-pandemic economic growth and a lower carbon future for all.”

Adapted to reflect forest sector successes and recent shifts in global markets, ICFPA’s latest policy statements offer detailed guidelines to help drive a circular future rooted in renewable forest resources. To read the new ICFPA Policy Statements, visit:

- [Climate Smart Forestry and Forest Products](#)
- [Carbon Neutrality of Biomass](#)
- [Commercial Forest Plantations](#)

For more information about the opportunities, sustainability, and solutions of the global forest and forest products sector, visit our website at <https://www.icfpa.org/>.

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*The ICFPA serves as a forum of global dialogue, coordination and co-operation. Currently, the ICFPA represents 18 pulp, paper, wood and fibre-based associations that encompass 28 countries, including many of the top pulp, paper and wood producers around the world.*

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## International Council of Forest and Paper Associations – Policy Statement

### Climate Smart Forestry and Forest Products

#### Climate Smart Forestry Leads to Climate Positive Products

Sustainably managed forests and forest products can play a critical role in helping achieve the global commitment reached at the United Nations COP-21 climate conference in Paris to limit global warming well below 2°C by the end of the century.

Mirroring this, a number of forest products industry and forestry associations around the globe have publicized their intentions to support the transition to a low- to net-zero carbon economy. In some cases going beyond, that is, committing to be climate positive.

The reduction or stabilization of the concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere can be achieved through the reduction of emissions of such gases and/or the increase of removals (e.g. through photosynthesis) and maintenance or increase of carbon stocks.

Sustainable forestry practices and forest products can contribute in both ways. As such, forestry in a broad sense is included in most countries' Nationally Determined Contributions.

#### Five Key Climate Smart Forestry and Forest Products Solutions

1. Responsibly managed forests absorb and durably sequester carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Forest Resource Assessment 2015, forests in the world were sequestering close to 300 Gigatonnes of carbon<sup>1</sup>. As with any mitigation action, carbon sequestration by forests should not be a substitute or silver bullet for action to reduce emissions but can ease achieving even the minimum Paris commitments and facilitate the transition to a lower carbon world.
2. Products made of wood and wood fibre store carbon and contribute to the reduction of concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.
3. A circular approach (use of renewable materials, reuse, and recycling) can enhance not only the storage of carbon but also reducing process emissions. The 2021 ICFPA Sustainability Progress Report shows a 12.6 percentage points (compared to 2000) increase in the global paper recycling rate, reaching 59.1%.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, minimizing landfilling of valuable resources through improved recycling reduces methane emissions. In addition to its renewable nature, the forest industry is recycling its products at high rates and aims at recycling more.

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<sup>1</sup> FAO, Global Forest Resource Assessment, 2015. The exact figure is 296 Gt.

<sup>2</sup> International Council of Forest and Paper Associations. ICFPA 2020-2021 Sustainability Progress Report. <https://icfpa.org/download/1182/>



4. Using wood and renewable raw materials for construction, products and energy replaces the use of fossil fuel or non-renewable materials and energy throughout multiple supply chains.
5. In the global forest products industry, 64.1% of on-site energy needs of the pulp and paper manufacturing industry are met by biomass and renewable energy, thus avoiding the release of additional CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. A large share of the biomass used by the forest products industry derives from manufacturing residuals that would otherwise be discarded and produce methane or be combusted without energy recovery<sup>3</sup>.

### **Enhancing and reaping forestry and forests products climate benefits**

Ahead of the critical COP-26 climate conference in Glasgow, the ICFPA reiterated its call for proper and holistic recognition of the positive role of sustainable forestry and forest products in the global climate challenge, and especially:

- The carbon removal and storage potential of all types of forests, therefore asking for ambitious measures to promote active forest management, afforestation, reforestation and actively combat deforestation.
- The carbon storage potential of wood products, therefore urging to promote the use of wood as a natural, renewable and recyclable raw material. In that context, the ICFPA members invite the negotiators to consider a revision of the list of products considered as “harvested wood products” under the land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) activities to reflect on the constant development of new categories of long-life wood products (e.g. textile produced from wood fibre).
- The avoided emissions thanks to the use of wood as raw material instead of fossil resources for products and fuel for energy. In that respect, the forest-based bioeconomy has the potential to enhance such substitution benefits and should be promoted.

### **Achieving this would also require commitments from governments and public authorities in support of private sector actions**

- Establish afforestation and reforestation programmes, where possible, to enhance carbon stocks and availability of wood for several purposes.
- Promote a more circular economy, based on reuse, recovery, and recycling of regenerative products.
- Support research and innovation to boost the development of renewable alternatives to fossil fuels or other non-renewable resources.
- Combat deforestation (especially from non-sustainable operations and illegal logging activities as well as from unsustainable practices in value chains outside the forest sector), which is recognized as being due to causes that are unrelated to sustainable forest management.
- Secure a concept of carbon neutrality of sustainably grown and harvested biomass.

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<sup>3</sup> National Council for Air and Stream Improvement. “Greenhouse Gas and Fossil Fuel Reduction Benefits of Using Biomass Manufacturing Residuals for Energy Production in Forest Products Facilities.” (Rev. August 2014). <http://ncasi.org/Downloads/Download.ashx?id=9603>.

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### Carbon Neutrality of Biomass

In many parts of the world, bioenergy and forest products are expected to play a significant role in the substitution of fossil fuels and fossil fuel-based products over the next decade.

The forest products industry plays an important role in contributing to the production of renewable energy and reducing dependence on fossil fuels by using renewable biomass to produce much of the energy required for its operations.

As forests grow, CO<sub>2</sub> is removed from the atmosphere via photosynthesis. This CO<sub>2</sub> is converted into organic carbon and stored in woody biomass. Trees release the stored carbon when they die, decay, or are combusted, completing the carbon cycle. The carbon in biomass will return to the atmosphere regardless of whether it is burned for energy, allowed to biodegrade, or lost in a forest fire. Renewable biomass sources like sustainably managed forests act as a “carbon recycler” by absorbing and releasing existing CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere and also storing large amounts of carbon throughout its existence.

The net impact of these processes is that CO<sub>2</sub> flows in and out of forests and through the forest products industry by both biomass combustion and carbon storage in products. Overall, the flow of forest CO<sub>2</sub> is better than carbon neutral when forests are sustainably managed. The carbon neutrality of forest biomass is a scientifically supported fact.<sup>1</sup>

The carbon neutrality of biomass harvested from sustainably managed forests has been recognized repeatedly by an abundance of studies, national legislation, and international policy, and carbon credit methodologies and projects including the science-based guidance of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>2</sup> and the reporting protocols of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). However, as some governments continue to introduce incentives and mandates to increase the use of renewable energy, concerns have been raised over the potential depletion of forest carbon stocks that may upset the carbon balance.

The ICFPA believes that:

1. CO<sub>2</sub> released from the combustion of woody biomass is part of the global carbon cycle and does not increase the amount of carbon in circulation in the biosphere when the growth of forest stocks is equal to or exceeds harvests at country level;

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<sup>1</sup> Miner, R., et al. *Forest Carbon Accounting Considerations in U.S. Bioenergy Policy*. Journal of Forestry: pp. 591-606. November 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). *Renewable energy sources and climate change mitigation*. Special report prepared by Working Group III of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Edenhofer, O., R. Pichs-Madruga, Y. Sokona, K. Seyboth, P. Matschoss, S. Kadner, T. Zwickel, et al. (eds.). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. 2012.

2. In the case of the use of biomass from afforestation of non-forested land or in the case of reforestation<sup>3</sup>, the CO<sub>2</sub> released from bio-energy production is also carbon neutral. In this case, by definition, the CO<sub>2</sub> has been previously absorbed from the atmosphere by the planted trees. Thus, when such trees are harvested or thinned and used for energy generation or other purposes, the released CO<sub>2</sub> will not represent a net addition of carbon to the atmosphere.

3. The concepts of ‘carbon debt’<sup>4</sup> and ‘payback time’<sup>5</sup> address the concern that an abrupt increase of bioenergy produced from forest biomass leads to emissions in the atmosphere, which can only be absorbed in longer timeframes. When such biomass comes from non-dedicated sources, ICFPA members encourage governments to address this concern by accounting emissions due to bioenergy policies in the land-use sector in line with international accounting rules, including tree growth that precedes harvesting (ie. IPCC criteria).

4. Assigning bioenergy production a zero value at the point of combustion in the energy system while accounting for emissions or removals in the land-use sector is in accordance with the rules agreed at the level of the IPCC. This is central to the use of bio-based wood and paper products as a substitute for other materials that are fossil fuel intensive, and therefore critical to the development of a well-functioning circular bioeconomy.

ICFPA members agree that understanding the right concepts, especially those already agreed by the international scientific community within the IPCC and the UNFCCC, is critical to the sustainability of the global forest and paper industry, while avoiding inappropriate double counting.

Carbon neutral wood biomass plays a central role in reducing or stabilizing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, either through emission reductions, removals or the maintenance of carbon stocks, and avoidance of emissions by substituting for higher-emitting materials depending on the potential of each company or country. This is one of the key solutions to achieve net-zero carbon targets.

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<sup>3</sup> According to FAO, “**Reforestation** is the re-establishment of forest formations after a temporary condition with less than 10% canopy cover due to human-induced or natural perturbations.”

<sup>4</sup> Carbon debt is the temporal imbalance between carbon emissions and carbon sequestration when using forest biomass for energy.

<sup>5</sup> Payback time is the number of years that it would take for carbon sequestration in a growing forest to offset the carbon emissions from the use of forest biomass for energy.



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### Commercial Forest Plantations

*“Sustainable forest management can help to manage some of these vulnerabilities (droughts, fires, insect outbreaks, diseases, erosion, and other disturbances), while in some cases, it can increase and maintain forest sinks through harvest, transfer of carbon to wood products and their use to store carbon and substitute emissions-intensive construction materials<sup>1</sup>.”*

The International Council of Forest and Paper Associations (ICFPA) advocates for the sustainable management of plantations and forests, as well as the responsible production of wood and fibre-based products to meet society’s increasing demand.

Sustainably managed timber plantations supply wood and fibre to forest-based industries which in turn make harvested wood products that people use every day – including but not limited to timber for construction, paper for communication, packaging, and hygiene products.

The promotion of responsibly sourced wood is key to curbing deforestation and driving down demand for illegally harvested wood while also providing functional alternatives to non-renewable materials that have significantly higher environmental footprints.

### Forest plantations are fundamental and provide several ecosystem services

Timber plantations not only make a major contribution to meeting the world’s increasing demand for forest products but deliver multiple environmental, social and economic services, including:

- **Provision** of an array of biodegradable, renewable, reusable and recyclable products and by-products, as well as non-timber products and services such as crop integration and grazing for livestock.
- **Regulation and support** through photosynthesis, enhancement of air quality, carbon storage; water quality and flow, minimization of flood damage; soil rehabilitation and erosion prevention; wind protection; and pollination. Plantations also reduce pressure on other types of forests and contribute to efficient land use, particularly in tree-poor and tropical countries, and aid biodiversity conservation by providing habitats and shelter for wildlife and plant species.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from IPCC, 5th Report (lines 47-51) available at [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGI\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_Full_Report.pdf)



- **Socio-economic contribution** of sustainable jobs, income, skills transfer and social development, often in rural, remote, and impoverished communities. In addition, forestry supports social inclusion through partnerships with small-scale timber growers and foresters and by agroforestry practices.
- **Cultural** value of plantations can be enhanced through environmental education and research; recreation, ecotourism, scenic beauty and wellbeing.

## Efficient land use

With timber plantations making up just 7.3% of the world's forests but contributing 50% of global roundwood\* supply, they are able to produce goods and services efficiently from relatively small areas. (*\*Roundwood is used for industrial purposes, either in its round form (e.g. transmission poles) or as raw material for industrial products such as sawn wood, panel products or pulp and paper*)

The harvested trees are replaced by new plantings or allowed to coppice once or twice before being replanted. Harvesting residues are left behind to enhance soil fertility and protection.

Plantations also provide flexibility and potential for alternative land uses such as bee-farming and other agroforestry enterprises.

### KEY FIGURES

- World land area: **13,064 million ha**
- World forest area: **4.06 billion hectares which is 31 percent of the total land area<sup>4</sup>**
- Total area of planted forests: **291 million ha<sup>2</sup>**
- Plantation forests cover about 131 million ha, which is 3 percent of the global forest area and 45 percent of the total area of planted forests<sup>4</sup>
- Total global area of industrial fast-growing forest plantations: 54.3 million ha, about 20% of the total area of planted forests<sup>3</sup>
- Contribution to global roundwood supply: **50%<sup>4</sup>**

## The role of forest plantations in a low carbon future

Trees will continue to be the source for many products – from the traditional (timber, pulp and paper, panels, laminate flooring and biomass energy) to the advanced (liquid biofuels, biochemicals, biomaterials, nanofibres or nanocrystals of cellulose products). Some forest products have the potential to expand and contribute to the bio and green economy by reversing the trend over recent years to fossil fuel based alternatives. As society seeks to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels and replace non-renewable materials with bio-based alternatives, the demand for forest-based products will flourish alongside growth in both population and incomes, particularly in developing countries.

<sup>2</sup> FAO Planted forests, accessed on <http://www.fao.org/forestry/plantedforests/en/>

<sup>3</sup> Indufor: Strategic Review on the Future of Forest Plantations. October 4, 2012. Study ordered by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

<sup>4</sup> FAO: Global Forest Resource Assessment, 2020 available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8753en/ca8753en.pdf>





In addition:

- Plantations can reduce pressure on natural forests in tropical countries.
- Biotechnology can optimize the production of biomass by growing trees that are resistant to pests and diseases, more water efficient, and temperature adaptive.
- Plantations play a critical role in supporting sustainable forest management and international processes, including United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Forum on Forests and Convention on Biological Diversity.