

POSITION WITH RESPECT TO THE NEW EUROPEAN FORESTRY STRATEGY

The Euroregion Pyrenees–Mediterranean (EPM), one of the first Euroregions in Europe created in the form of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in 2004, comprises the Government of the Balearic Islands (ES), the Occitanie Region (FR) and the Generalitat of Catalonia (ES). As a key player in European regional policy, the EPM promotes the values of the EU on its territory. In this sense, the EPM wishes to have its position acknowledged and to participate in the debate on future European policies.

The EPM wishes to highlight the forestry policies that the Occitanie, Catalonia and Balearic regions have implemented on their respective territories and develop a common response to a consultation on a new European forestry strategy. The shared Euro-Mediterranean territory and the similar challenges facing this territory in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change mean these policies have many elements in common.

The main points concerning the position of the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean are as follows:

1. The members of the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean agree on **the need for a Europe-wide forestry strategy** enabling the economic, social and environmental aspects of forest areas to be taken into account.
2. **The Euroregional commitment is that of sustainable forest management based on long-term planning.** The development of a stable Europe-wide framework and setting strategic goals are key to successful planning. The EFS must meet the challenge of resolving existing and future conflicts between the different uses that converge in forest areas. It must resolve the inconsistencies that remain between the different regulations that overlap in this area (mainly between forest management and nature and landscape conservation). Sustainable forest management has proven to be one of the best means of adapting to climate change, making forests more resilient and maintaining many of the ecosystem services they provide.
3. **Restoring degraded forest lands must be considered as a priority in the EFS** even before afforestation or reforestation. Apart from the specific situations related to erosion and urbanisation processes, there has been a constant increase in forest surface areas in the EPM in recent years and this generates other problems (increased risk of fires, loss of biodiversity, etc.) that could be further aggravated were a undiscerning policy of reforestation to be implemented without careful prior planning. We are committed to avoiding the further loss of agricultural land and the corresponding activities, as well as excessively large unbroken stretches of forest lands, preferring, where possible, a mosaic structure, with alternating forest and agricultural areas. In this sense, the project to plant more than 3 billion trees in the EU, as proposed in the consultation on the future EFS, must be analysed globally with an assessment of the different factors involved for each region (territorial planning, natural land use, potential for the production of goods and services and the environmental, social and economic impact of these plantation operations). In the specific case of the EPM, these plantations should preferably be located in basins having flooding or soil erosion problems and degraded and peri-urban areas. Plantations should promote ecological connectivity and reduce the impact generated by certain infrastructures.

4. **The EFS must also take into account the protection of forests against biotic and abiotic risks** which ignore administrative boundaries. Risk prevention and the fight against their impacts on forests must necessarily be **carried out within a framework of regional territorial cooperation**, with a harmonisation of strategies and consistent management criteria. Resource allocation at the Euroregional level is essential to achieving this.
5. **Forest areas should be considered as a key instrument for mitigating the effects of climate change.** It is necessary to go beyond the vision of forests as simple carbon sinks and promote the carbon storage capacity of forest products. The EFS should take this role into account, provide mechanisms to properly assess the role of forests and wood products in carbon sequestration, and propose measures to provide financial support for this task.
6. **Sustainable forest management actively contributes to the conservation of biodiversity and this must be recognised in the EFS,** without ignoring the need for management monitoring. Biodiversity conservation is an intrinsic component of sustainable forest management and should not be considered as an additional condition.
7. **The EFS should promote value chains related to forest management.** Promoting value chains contributes to the achievement of the goals set in global agendas (notably in the *Green Deal*). This promotion implies the need to prioritise research and innovation in areas that enable new bioproducts to be procured from forest resources, but the use of conventional forestry products, such as wood, must also be promoted as an alternative to other less sustainable materials and processes. Uses appropriate to the type of products originating in each geographic area and those with a long life cycle and greater added value should be encouraged.
8. Forest areas provide a large number of services, beyond wood and non-wood products. **The EFS should put mechanisms in place to maximise ecosystem services, ensure there is balance with other uses and propose instruments to promote these services.** There is currently no information system integrating the multiple benefits that forest areas offer society. The new strategy must also incorporate this aspect in order to be able to accurately assess progress in achieving goals.
9. Abandoning agroforestry activity has implications for land and landscape use. **Ecosystem planning is necessary for land use management and territorial planning** since it is directly related to forest hydrology for example. In the same vein, the development of technological, environmental, political and social solutions must be envisaged. These solutions must be sustainable over time and enable greater integration of the different systems in place (hydrology, forests, biodiversity, agriculture, livestock, etc.) with the dynamics and needs of local communities.
10. **The EFS must clearly differentiate Mediterranean forests from those of Central and Northern Europe.** Orographic limitations, reduced rainfall or the more immediate effects of climate change affect the economic viability of forest management in much of the Euro-Mediterranean area. However, the large number of environmental services provided by forests, which benefit society as a whole, fully justifies the allocation of public resources to forest management.

11. Sustainable forest management cannot be left solely to the natural and legal persons who own the forests, nor can it depend on the availability of the resources they have to carry out the planned actions. The fact that the benefits are shared by society as a whole means **the proposed management action must be financed** within a stable framework adapted to the long-term vision inherent in forestry planning. All stakeholders involved must be mobilised and innovative management and financing mechanisms proposed.
12. **The EFS cannot ignore the EU's responsibility with respect to the huge challenges facing the planet** and this strategy must devise instruments to strengthen sustainable forest management practices beyond the EU's borders by facilitating inter-territorial cooperation. The EFS must facilitate the adoption of specific commitments for different countries and regions in the context of their global commitments.