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International Council of Forest and Paper Associations – Policy Statement

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 materials¹.”

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.

¹ 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



- **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 area⁴**
- Total area of planted forests: **291 million ha²**
- 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 forests⁴
- Total global area of industrial fast-growing forest plantations: 54.3 million ha, about 20% of the total area of planted forests³
- Contribution to global roundwood supply: **50%⁴**

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.

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

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

⁴ 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.