



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT**

**Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the
implementation of the Forest Focus scheme
according to Regulation (EC) No 2152/2003 of the European Parliament and of the
Council of 17 November 2003 concerning monitoring of forests and environmental
interactions in the Community (Forest Focus)**

{SEC(2008) 30}

1. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

This report responds to the reporting requirements of Article 19 of Regulation 2152/2003. This regulation established a Community scheme (hereinafter referred to as 'Forest Focus') for broad based harmonised and comprehensive long-term monitoring of the condition of forests for a period of 4 years from 1 January 2003 to 31 December 2006.

This regulation was repealed by Regulation (EC) No 614/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the Financial Instrument for the Environment (LIFE+). As LIFE+ provides for measures relevant to the scope of Forest Focus, it is proposed not to make any proposal regarding the continuation of Forest Focus beyond 2006.

The report, therefore, is confined in scope to the implementation phase of Forest Focus.

2. FOREST FOCUS: THE SCHEME AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

2.1. Background and Objectives

Forest Focus built on earlier legislation related mainly to forest health condition monitoring under the UNECE Convention on Long Range Trans-boundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP) to which the Community is a party¹. The relevant Community legislation, Council Regulation (EEC) No 3528/86 of 17 November 1986 on the protection of the Community's forests against atmospheric pollution² and Council Regulation (EEC) No 2158/92 of 23 July 1992 on protection of the Community's forests against fire³ expired at the end of 2002.

Forest Focus centred on monitoring atmospheric pollution of forests, monitoring of forest fires, their causes and effects and forest fire prevention. The scheme also foresaw developing new monitoring instruments relating to soil monitoring, carbon sequestration, biodiversity, climate change and protective functions of forests, as well as evaluating the efficiency of monitoring activities. In this context, the Member States are currently carrying out studies, experiments and demonstration projects, which are to be completed in 2008.

Under the scheme, networks of thousands of observation points and plots (Level I and Level II plots, see footnote 1) were maintained in order to produce periodic inventories and carry out continuous monitoring of forest ecosystems.

¹ ICP Forests (the International Co-operative Programme on assessment and monitoring of air pollution effects on forests) was launched in 1985 under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) due to the growing public awareness of possible adverse effects of air pollution on forests. ICP Forests monitors the forest condition in Europe, in cooperation with the European Commission using two different monitoring intensity levels. The first grid (called Level I) is based on around 6000 observation plots on a systematic transnational grid of 16 x 16 km throughout Europe. The intensive monitoring level comprises around 800 Level II plots in selected forest ecosystems in Europe. These Level I and II plots are common with the Forest Focus programme. Currently 40 countries participate in the ICP Forests. See also: <http://www.icp-forests.org/Political.htm>

² OJ L 326, 21.11.1985, p.2.

³ OJ L 217, 31.07.1992, p.3-7.

2.2. Operation

The Commission was responsible for coordinating, monitoring and developing the scheme. In order to achieve the objectives of Forest Focus, Member States were required to draw up two-year national programmes for 2003/2004 and 2005/2006 (split in two phases 2005 and 2006). These programmes were submitted to the Commission for approval and were also subject to *ex-ante* evaluations.

Each Member State was required to designate a competent authority to manage its national programme. However, as Belgium, Germany and Portugal designated more than one competent authority per country, a total of 41 competent authorities are implementing the scheme. This includes competent authorities in EU 10 (except Malta) which joined the scheme in 2004.

The Commission adopted Decisions⁴ on the designation of the national agencies carrying out the scheme, the national programmes and their budget and notified the Decisions to the participating Member States. Subsequently, the Commission concluded agreements for each of the national programme periods with the national competent bodies. On the basis of these decisions, the Commission concluded, in total, 123 agreements with the competent bodies covering, in full, the period 2003-06.

The total Forest Focus budget over the 4-year period was €M 65, including €M 9 for fire prevention measures. The European Union contributed financially towards the cost of national programmes at a rate of 50% or 75% depending on the type of activity. Annex I shows the yearly breakdown of the actions developed under the scheme.

Forest Focus activities in each national programme can be divided into (see Figures 1 and 2):

- A activities concerning **project coordination and management**, such as activities related to the coordination of the national programme;
- B1 activities carried out on the basis of the **Level I monitoring network**, such as installation and maintenance of the systematic gridnet ;
- B2 activities carried out on **Level II plots involving intensive monitoring**, i.e. activities, such as crown condition measurements;
- B3 activities on **forest fire prevention**, including the European Forest Fire Information System. Activities included are the establishment of firebreaks, maintenance and further development of the European Forest Fires Information System (EFFIS) and awareness raising campaigns;
- C activities: **Studies and demonstration projects**, such as studies on the identification of causes and dynamic of forest fires, monitoring test phases (see also list of studies in the annex)

⁴ Decision 2003-2004: Commission Decision C(2004)4901 final
Decision 2005: Commission Decision C(2006)874 final
Decision 2006: Commission Decision C(2006) 2466 final

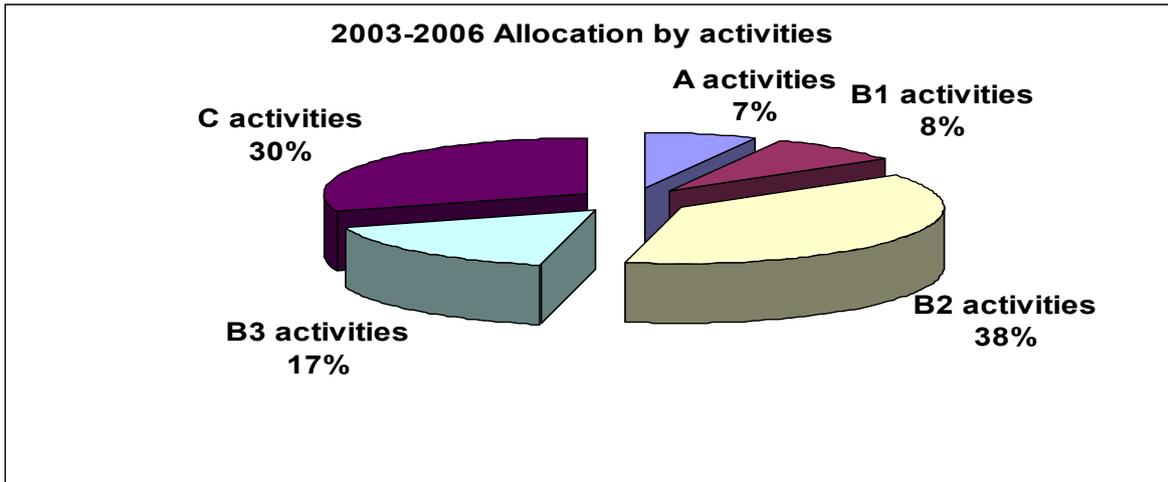


Fig. 1: Budget allocation by percentage of type of activity. (A: project coordination and management; B1: Level I monitoring; B2: Level II intensive monitoring; B3: forest fire prevention; C: studies and demonstration projects)

The Commission (DG Joint Research Centre) supported and supports the scheme both technically and scientifically. Its scientific coordination body has set up a database designed to fulfil the needs of the data collection regime of the scheme and has developed and further improved the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) according to requirements expressed by the Member States and the Parliament. The JRC manages the European Forest Data Centre of the Commission.

On the basis of a grant agreement with the Commission, ICP-Forests (see footnote 1) assured the functioning of expert panels and developed harmonised methods and standards of forest condition monitoring at Level I & II, including the elaboration of a common monitoring manual and quality assurance / quality control systems for field observations and laboratory analyses. For fulfilling these tasks, ICP-Forests was supported by 6 partners, mainly forest research institutes.

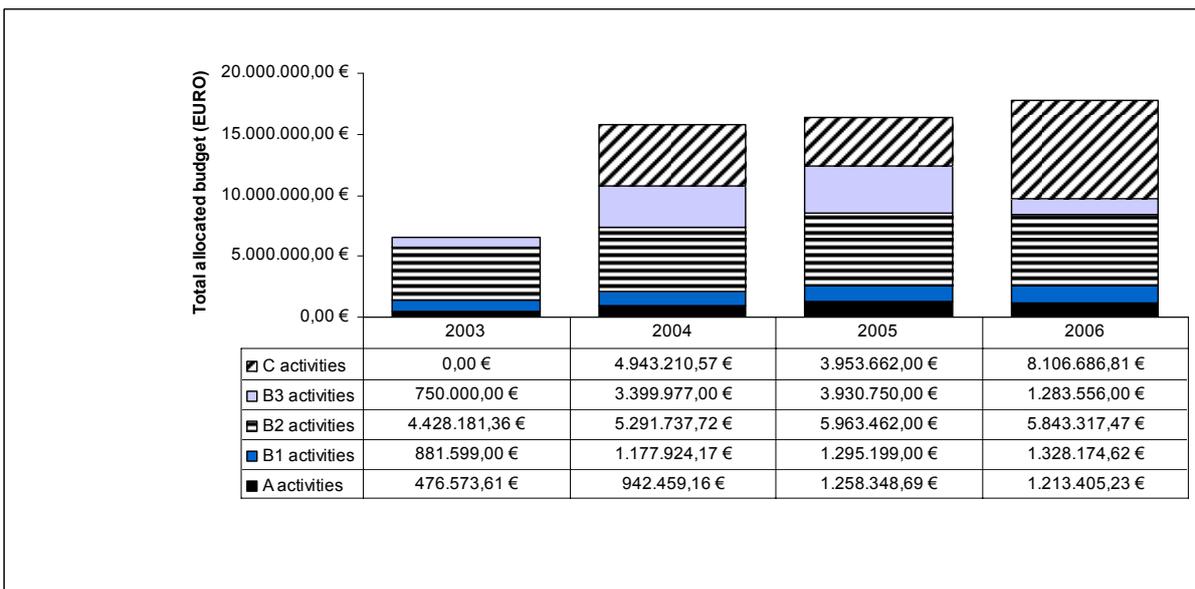


Fig.2: Budget allocation by type of activity from 2003 to 2006. (A: project coordination and management; B1: Level I monitoring; B2: Level II intensive monitoring; B3: forest fire prevention; C: studies and demonstration projects)

3. REPORTING

The Member States fulfilled their annual reporting obligations by forwarding to the Commission annual data (also making it publicly available⁵), collected under Forest Focus accompanied by an annual report. Mid-term reports dealing with the first period of the programme (2003-2004) have now been delivered to the Commission. Final reports are due when each of the national programmes is completed which can be expected to be up to three years after the programme period in question. This delay is mainly due to the need to complete studies. In addition, the competent bodies implementing the scheme have to inform the Commission regularly on the progress they make in implementing the programme.

Overall Forest Focus reporting is assured through yearly reports published by the European Commission and ICP-Forests, as well as through a series of scientific publications (see <http://www.icp-forests.org/Reports.htm>) which are used to inform national forest and environmental policies. The drafting and publication of the ICP-Forest reports is co-financed by the Commission on the basis of a grant agreement.

4. DETAILED ASPECTS OF IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. Forest fires

A permanent but informal group of experts on forest fires was set up in 1998 by the Commission and Member States as an information exchange platform with the aim of developing advanced methods for the evaluation of forest fire risk and mapping of burnt areas at the European scale. In the following years, these activities led to the development of the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS)⁶ by the Joint Research Centre. EFFIS was further supported under the Forest Focus scheme and its continuation was assured by an administrative arrangement between DG Environment and DG Joint Research Centre. The storage and analyses of the data collected by the Member States and the coordination of fire related activities at European level are done in the context of EFFIS which provides daily fire risk forecast, analyses the yearly fire risk evolution and evaluates the most recent fire season, thus identifying eventual weaknesses in managing and combating fires inside and outside the EU territory. The activities of EFFIS are coordinated by the Commission to deliver information to the final users, mainly civil protection and forest services in the Member States. EFFIS is also used for assessing forest damage claims contained in applications for financial assistance from the European Solidarity Fund⁷. The forest fire expert group is composed by experts from the national authorities, including civil protection. The group is the only common fire expert network at EU level and includes representatives of all Member States and some Mediterranean third countries facing significant fire risks. This co-operation with neighbouring third countries is of considerable value since the establishment of cross-

⁵ Although the publication and dissemination of data was discussed several times with the competent bodies, no agreement could be reached on this issue. Data are therefore not available for the general public, unless the data owners are consulted.

⁶ EFFIS is aimed to provide relevant information for the protection of forests against fire in Europe addressing both pre-fire and post-fire conditions <http://effis.jrc.it/wmi/viewer.html>

⁷ Council Regulation 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002, OJ L 311, 14.11.2002, p.3.

border prevention measures and mutual assistance in fire-fighting activities relies on common European fire risk mapping.

Forest Focus allowed funding for structural fire prevention measures, such as the building of forest tracks, water supply points or fire detection stations, provided that they were not supported by the Rural Development Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999⁸ and that they were not included in the national or regional rural development programmes.

An ad hoc working group of forest fire prevention experts composed by representatives from interested Member States and the main non governmental organisations involved in the forest sector was established in 2004 to put forward proposals to the Commission about how to address forest fire prevention policies after 2006.

Amongst its recommendations⁹ this working group proposed that the LIFE+ and Rural Development Regulations should both establish specific provisions for protecting the environment against fires. For the period 2007-13 both do so. LIFE+ contains provisions for information and awareness-raising campaigns in relation to forest fires, as well as training of agents involved in fire prevention. Rural development provides for fire prevention and restoration measures. In addition, the working group supported EFFIS as a strategic planning tool and as a core element of forest fire monitoring. The work of EFFIS which was supported by Forest Focus is assured till end 2010 by means of a grant of the European Parliament on forest protection and conservation.

Since 2000, and in close collaboration with the group of experts, the Commission issues a yearly report on forest fires¹⁰ which refers to fire statistics in the most affected Member States (see tables "number of fires" and "burnt area" in Annex).

4.2. Forest condition and other environmental monitoring – the evaluation report

Although various studies under Forest Focus will not be completed until 2008, the Commission undertook an external evaluation related notably to the management of the programme and forest condition monitoring in 2005. The evaluation was carried out by the research institutes "Forest Research" (UK) and "Finnish Forest Research Institute" (FI) (see: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/pdf/final_report.pdf).

The evaluation suggested the following:

The management of the programmes was cost effective but that in Member States with more than one competent authority the administrative burden was increased.

Monitoring activities (Level I+II plots) should focus more widely than on forest health condition related to air pollution. They should include parameters related to climate change, biodiversity and the protective functions of forests.

Data from national forest inventories should be taken into account when forest monitoring takes place.

The continuation of the monitoring scheme should be assured.

The report also points out that the ending of the Forest Focus Regulation removes the obligation from the Member States to conduct coordinated EU-level forest monitoring, and that in order to avoid uncoordinated activities in the future, it would be necessary to develop

⁸ OJ L 160, 26.6.1999, p.80.

⁹ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/wgffp.htm>,

¹⁰ <http://forest.jrc.it/documents/2006/ForestFiresInEurope2005.pdf>

an EU-wide framework which allows for efficient management, data recording, analysis, quality control and reporting.

The Commission points out that while this evaluation was carried out at an early stage of implementation, its main recommendation concerning the extension of monitoring activities is now included within the scope of LIFE+.

The Commission recalls that the continuation of forest monitoring activities is also indicated in the EU Forest Action Plan¹¹ 2007 – 2011. Key action 8 of the Action Plan proposes to work towards establishing a European Forest Monitoring System. The Council Conclusions¹² on the EU Forest Action Plan also indicate a clear commitment from the Member States to further develop a European forest monitoring system.

Proposals under LIFE+ have not yet been received, but can include the involvement of national forest authorities responsible for inventories. As LIFE+ is project based with voluntary participation, monitoring should, in future, be more related to specific policy issues such as climate change, biodiversity and the protective functions of forests rather than a continuation of a series of observations on the basis of traditional parameters related to air pollution as was the situation under Forest Focus.

With regard to the management of the scheme, the Commission indicates that average financial commitment per programme is low. For 2003-2004 it amounted to approximately €M0.5 per contracting party with a range between € 20.000 and €M 2.7. For 2005 it was €M 0.4 with a range between € 20.000 and €M 2.1 and for 2006 €M 0.4 ranging from € 28.000 to €M 2.1. Of this, approximately 7% was devoted by the various competent authorities to co-ordination and management of the national programmes.

¹¹ COM(2006) 302 final of 15.6.2006.

¹² Council Conclusions on the EU Forest Action Plan 2007 – 2011. 2758th Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting. 24 – 25 October 2006.