

**Austria's Report**  
**on the Implementation of the Proposals for Action**  
**of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental**  
**Forum on Forests (IFF)**

Reference: Decision I/2, Section B, para. 5;  
Decision I/3, paras. 9 and 23,  
adopted at the first session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)

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**Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry,  
Environment and Water Management**  
**VIENNA/AUSTRIA**

The management, protection and sustainable development of Austrian forests is based on a well established legal and institutional framework. Austria can point to a periode of more then a century with significant progress in formulating and implementing policies towards sustainable management of its forests.

That means the aspects of comprehensive sustainable forest management as discussed by IPF and IFF are to a large extent already a substantial element in Austria's policies for, and management of, its forests. However, Austria's forest related policy has gained new momentum from the **UN Conference on Environment and Development** held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the global and regional follow-up processes on forests such as IPF, IFF and the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE).

These processes not only created stimuli that led to broad national dialogues on sustainable forest management. Another positive aspect that resulted was an increased international interaction and co-operation. Additionally it also created innovative concepts and approaches towards sustainable forest management with the result that

sustainable forest management is being more strongly integrated, both regionally and internationally.

In Austria sustainable forest management is considered as an integrative approach towards ensuring economic viability, ecological richness and socio-cultural values of forests in a long term run. The driving force to achieve sustainable forest management is the concept of close-to-nature silviculture. Globalisation has brought new dimensions to market and policies with regard to forests and environment which makes it at certain points difficult to implement close-to-nature silviculture measures. This is due to fact that the revenues generated from purchasing wood products would hardly suffice the cost measures. However, considering the enormous impact of forests on society, the central objective of Austria's forest policy is to ensure a sustainable and proper forest management which is in harmony with nature because only such forests are able to fulfil all their functions over the long-term.

### **Current activities concerning IPF/IFF proposals**

Up to now there has been only a rudimentary scientific based assessment of the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action for Austria therefore, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management has authorized the Institute of Forest Sector Policy and Economics at the University of Agricultural Science (Vienna) to carry out a study on the relevance of the IPF and IFF proposals for action for Austria and the degree of their implementation.

The assessment of the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action for the Austrian context takes into considerations the 16 categories, which have been found relevant by the international community during the informal deliberations in February 2001 and during the first substantive session of UNFF1 this year. But for methodological reasons all the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action are clustered into 14 subject areas that relate very closely to the original IPF/IFF work programmes. This is important for the analysis as the IPF/IFF Proposals relate directly and indirectly to the respective headings.

### *The 14 subject areas of the Proposals for Action*

1. Promoting and monitoring progress of implantation
2. National Forest and land-use programmes
3. Underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation
4. Traditional forest-related knowledge
5. Fragile ecosystems affected by desertification and drought
6. Impact of airborne pollution on forests
7. Needs and requirements for developing and other countries with low forest cover
8. International co-operation
  - Financial assistance
  - Technology transfer, capacity-building and information
9. Assessment of multiple benefits of all types of forests
10. Forest research
11. Methodologies for the proper valuation of the multiple benefits of forests, forest goods and services
12. Criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management
13. Trade and environment in relation to forest products and services
  - Economic instruments, tax policies and land tenure
  - Future supply and demand for wood and non-wood forest products and services
14. International organisations, regional organisations, multilateral institutions and instruments

The IPF/IFF Proposals for Action are analysed with a view to assess whether they are relevant for Austria. The IPF/IFF Proposals for Action may be relevant for national implementation, international implementation or remain irrelevant for Austria.

It is assessed further to which policy field the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action appeal to e.g. forestry policy, agricultural policy, research policy, development policy etc.

The Austrian implementation responsibility of the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action is assessed to whether the Proposals address international or national action and to whether there is a primary or a secondary implementation responsibility to be acknowledged. A primary implementation responsibility is given, when IPF/IFF Proposals for Action address conventions, Austria ratified and when the Austrian federal level has an exclusive competence in this particular policy field given legal texts. A secondary implementation responsibility is given, when the European Union acts on behalf of Austria equipped with an exclusive competence (e.g. trade or

agricultural policy). A secondary implementation responsibility for Austria (the federal state) is also acknowledged due to competencies of the federal provinces (Bundesländer).

The implementation degree of every IPF/IFF Proposals for Action in Austria is assessed according to the following criteria:

- main aspects are addressed
- some aspects are addressed
- part of some aspects are addressed
- planned to address Proposals of Action
- nothing is addressed

The results of this study are expected by spring 2002. Therefore, the report at hand should be seen as a preliminary reflection with regard to sustainable forest management in Austria in connection to the IPF and IFF proposals for action.

### **Achievements in implementing sustainable forest management**

According to the results of Austria's 1992/1996 Forest Inventory the country's annual cut of wood - measured in solid cubic meters - is 19.5 million compared with an annual increment of 27.3 million. In other words **only two thirds** of the annual growth of wood is **utilised**. The overall stock of wood in the forests has risen to 988 million of solid cubic meters. The forest cover is increasing too, having grown **by 7,700 hectares annually** since the last census period, to a total of 3.92 million hectares – forming 47% of the country's surface area.

Over and above the purely **quantitative** statements, **qualitative improvements** in the condition of forests can be recorded as a consequence of close-to-nature management applied on an enlarged scale. This management involves increasing the proportions of deciduous and mixed forest stands, having fewer clearings, and increasing the proportion of the total wooded area being left to natural regeneration to over 50%. In Austria at the moment 1.763.000 hectares of woodlands are certified under PEFC, and 3.366 hectares under FSC.

Increased importance is being attached to the maintenance and improvement of biodiversity. Within the UNESCO project “Man And The Biosphere” (MAB) the study "Hemerobia of Austrian Forest Ecosystems" was carried out. In this study the geographical distribution and the share of original, manipulated and artificial forest ecosystems have been examined. According to this study 25% of the Austrian forest can be considered as natural or near-natural, 41% have been moderately changed compared to the optimal state. 27% of the forest can be referred to as considerably changed by human influence. Only 7% are artificial, and hence far away from a natural forest ecosystem.

In order to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases Austria takes efforts in the field of renewable sources of energy. More than 5,800 new heating systems using wood chips and pellets were installed through the country in 2000. About 17% of Austrian households are currently heated by wood.

Participatory approaches and increased communication have been introduced in forest planning. A process on elaborating a National Forest Program has been started.

Austria attaches great importance to international interaction and co-operation with regard to forest related matters. Austria currently holds the chairmanship – jointly with Poland – of the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE). In this capacity Austria is applying itself intensively to the implementation of the IPF and IFF proposals for action on a pan-European scale. Austria is putting particular emphasis on regional and global collaboration in respect of common economic, ecological and socio-cultural policies for sustainable forest management. A focus of bilateral and multilateral co-operation lays on central and eastern European countries with economies in transition. A series of workshops for countries in transition to market economy concerning specific forest subjects has been conducted by Austria over the last years.

### **Factors in support of sustainable forest management:**

- Well established legal, institutional and financial framework
- Special education, training and research focusing on a holistic sustainability concept
- Applied traditional forest related knowledge, transferred in forest owning families over generations
- Comparatively high productivity of forest stands
- High economic, ecological and socio-cultural values of forests due to dense populated mountainous terrain, important tourism industry depending on intact landscapes and export oriented timber industry

### **Factors impeding sustainable forest management**

- Small scale, fragmented forest ownership structure (around 171 000 forest owners, average size of a forest holding is 19 ha)
- Two third of Austria is mountainous terrain
- High pressure on forest land and ecosystems by tourism and recreation activities
- Decreasing economic viability of wood production in connection with competition and substitution of forest based products
- Pressure on forest ecosystems through browsing, grazing and air pollution

### **Steps taken to improve sustainable forest management**

- Support of forest owner co-operations
- Subsidies especially dedicated to enhance the multiple benefits of forests
- Special financial and technical programs to increase and restore protective function of mountain forest
- Amendment of the Austrian Forest Law taking into account international agreements
- Initiation of an NFP process
- Integration of forest subsidies in the rural development program
- Reorganisation of forest institutions
- Transforming the state owned forest into an shareholder company
- Establishing a network of natural forest reserves
- Support activities in favour of improving environmental conditions
- Extension of the co-operation between the forest management and the wood industry
- Training and further education with emphasis on ecological elements
- Increased international activities