Dear Madam,

Further to decisions taken during UNFF3 in Geneva last year, forwarded herewith are the views of Malaysia pertaining to:

1. The Concepts of Ecosystem Approach and Sustainable Forest Management; and
2. The Parameters For Developing A Legal Framework on All Types of Forests.

Thank you.

Regards,

AHMAD RIZAL KHALIT
For the Secretary General
Ministry of Primary Industries
Malaysia

MALAYSIA’S VIEWS ON THE CONCEPTS OF ECOSYSTEM APPROACH AND SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

1. Currently, sustainable forest management stresses the management aspect and is restricted to forest management, while ecosystem approach emphasizes the ecological integration of forest ecosystem into other neighbouring ecosystems and encompass more than just the forest aspect. In addition, sustainable forest management sets specific targets of action to assess progress towards the achievement of sustainable management of a given forest management unit.

2. In contrast, the ecosystem approach does not contain targets, but advocates the starting point for action in managing the ecosystem. Hence, as emphasized in Decision V/6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the application of an ecosystem approach would require adaptive management to deal with the complex and dynamic nature of ecosystems in the absence of complete knowledge or understanding of their functioning.

3. Notwithstanding this, the application of the ecosystem approach is expected to consider all the twelve guiding principles in Decision V/6 of the CBD in a holistic and integrated manner and as a package, as well as with appropriate weight given to each, taking into account local conditions. As such, the application of an ecosystem approach which is best applied at the landscape level has given rise to an apparent paradox in using
the ecosystem approach in managing forest resources at the local or forest management unit level, especially those that are subjected to forest management certification in the overall context of timber labelling and certification that is currently demanded by the environmentally sensitive markets in Europe and the United States of America. This is in view that managing forest resources at this level would not be able to embrace and address simultaneously in a holistic and integrated manner all the ecological goods and services provided by forest equitably as the unit of management may be too small to permit the management of all ecological processes. However, the aggregation of each individual management unit which is being managed for the production of a single or few forest goods and services based on an ecosystem approach, when treated as a whole at the landscape level, would be identical to managing the forest resources through an ecosystem approach as envisioned in the CBD.

4. It should also be noted that the application of the ecosystem approach as guided by the twelve principles are not specifically related to forests, for example, the call to reduce market distortion and perverse incentives in Principle 4, as well as the negative externalities that impair forestry are often found beyond the sphere of influence of the forestry sector itself. Hence, if an ecosystem approach is to be applied in managing forest resources, then it should be based on certain specific interpretations of the ecosystem approach and not the general formulations of the twelve guiding principles of the ecosystem approach which are hardly operational as yet.

5. In this context, although current forest management practices generally focus on a single or few marketable values, for example timber and non-timber products, through the implementation of forest management plan; the management of non-marketable values, such as soil, water and other forest biological diversity are also taken into account in their production, especially the criteria and indicators used for assessing, monitoring and reporting progress towards sustainable forest management.

6. If forest is to be truly managed through an ecosystem approach then it is pertinent to have analytical tools to valuate the trade-offs between short-term benefits and long-term goals of the various goods and services provided by forest; forecasting models to assess the social, cultural and environmental consequences of management action that take into account the ecological tolerances and resilience of the forest ecosystem; cost-effective methodologies to conduct inventory that encompasses the full range of ecological, biological and social diversity of forest; environmental impact assessments that cover all the components of biological diversity, as well as the potential off-site impacts on adjacent and other ecosystems, including social impact assessment; knowledge and sciences required to define the ecological rotations of the various goods and services provided by forest, and the “desired forest future”; and the full economic valuation of forest goods and services that would enable the internalization of costs and benefits of the forest ecosystem.

7. However, both the concepts of ecosystem approach and sustainable forest management put people at the centre of management as well as the need for transparent stakeholders participation involving a combination of bottom-up and top-down approach,
although the ecosystem approach of the CBD seems to place greater emphasis on the content and comprehensiveness of the principles, rather that what precisely needs to be achieved and how that achievement could be demonstrated through management. Nevertheless, the long-term goals of sustainable forest management in the overall context of sustainable development are identical to the vision of managing forest resources through an ecosystem approach.

8. In this regard, it would be better to just incorporate some of the ideas and aspects required in the ecosystem approach that are relevant to forestry to the current framework of sustainable forest management, based on a phased approach, which is well-understood and operated by more than 150 countries, covering 95 percent of the world’s forests, through further refinement and/or development of criteria, indicators and standards of performance for sustainable forest management.