

Australian Opening Statement for UNFF-7

Mr Chairman

Australia thanks you and the Bureau for the leadership you are providing for the important work of this session of UNFF.

Australia has come to New York ready to finalise negotiations on both the non-legally binding instrument and the multi-year program of work. Last December's ad-hoc expert meeting and the Bali Country Led Initiative were both conducted in a very positive spirit and their outcomes provide us with a very good foundation for our work over the next two weeks. We recognise that there are still many issues to resolve and that there are differences of opinion on some important issues. However, we must succeed in completing our work and building a stronger future for UNFF, for the sake of the world's forests and the communities that depend on them.

Mr Chairman, for some years now, Australia has been arguing for UNFF to have a stronger focus on action and to limit negotiations to new issues which need international agreement. In line with this philosophy, I would like to draw your attention to the Australian Government's recent announcement of a A\$200 million International Forests Initiative aimed at encouraging Global Action on Forests and Climate Change. This initiative will include programmes designed to reduce deforestation, increase sustainable forest management and facilitate reforestation.

Mr Chairman at UNFF-6 we all committed to reducing the loss of forest cover world wide. Deforestation accounts for 20 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The Australian Government's new International Forests Initiative, will aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in those countries in which we jointly implement programmes. The package includes \$100 million of additional ODA to work with developing countries, particularly in South East Asia and the South Pacific. These funds will enable partner countries to build their technical capacity to sustainably manage their forests, encourage reforestation of degraded forest areas and put in place effective regulatory and law enforcement arrangements to protect forests and prevent illegal logging.

In addition, \$100 million of new funding will be provided for other related activities, including developing and deploying the technology and systems needed to help developing countries produce assessments of their forest resources, piloting approaches to provide financial incentives to countries to encourage sustainable use of forests, as well as working with governments and businesses in other countries to build support for enhancing this important global action programme.

Mr Chairman Australia is clearly willing to play its part in providing additional funds to facilitate implementation of important forest related development programmes. What we need now is a greater commitment at the intergovernmental level. We believe that this commitment could be shown by the adoption of a non legally binding instrument on forests and by having a strong MYPOW, which focuses our work on those issues that will make a difference and strengthens the linkages with regional organisations. We certainly want to begin the cycle of regional meetings in 2008.

Australia would like to see the Non Legally Binding Instrument provide a greater commitment to the implementation of sustainable forest management and achievement of the Global Objectives on Forests. We think this can be achieved by strengthening the wording in Section Roman V and by including a clear high level articulation of what sustainable forest management involves and its relationship with the Seven Thematic Elements. We also think that we need to provide improved clarity of the key elements of the NLBI in a way that will facilitate implementation of its provisions at the national level.

Mr Chairman, in regard to the MYPOW Australia welcomes the work the Bureau has done since the Bali CLI to assist our deliberations. We think it provides a good basis for us to work from. However, we have some concerns about the proposed preparatory meetings, the mid term review and the High Level Ministerial Segments which we will discuss during the working group.

Australia strongly supports a regional approach for implementing sustainable forest management and the work of the UNFF. We think that more thought is needed on how this important new mechanism can be best made to work. Australia thinks that it may be worthwhile having a meeting later this year of representatives from all the existing regional organisations, the UNFF Secretariat and interested countries to develop practical modalities. One important element is to ensure that the regional organisations and UNFF have a two way relationship, whereby these regional organisations can both implement and influence UNFF programmes.

Mr Chairman, Australia thinks we need to give greater attention in the MYPOW to the role that forest certification can play in the implementation of sustainable forest management. Australia has prepared a short non paper on this issue to assist other delegations to understand our thinking. Forest certification schemes have a valuable and growing role to play in achieving sustainable forest management, combating illegal logging and identifying forest products from sustainably managed forests. Yet to date only about 20% of the world's production forests are covered by forest certification and most of these are in the developed world. Australia is keen to facilitate a Country Led Initiative on this issue in order to contribute to discussions at UNFF-8. Copies of the non paper will be available at the back of the room or from the Australian delegation.

Mr Chairman, Australia has some concerns about the proposed work programme for UNFF-7. We think that the Working Groups need to commence their work on Tuesday morning so that we have sufficient time to complete the negotiations. We have very unpleasant memories from UNFF-5 where there was insufficient time for negotiations. We urge the Bureau to consider either shortening or postponing some sessions, such as the discussions on the International Year of the Forests, to enable the Working Groups to begin their work.

Mr Chairman, Australia stands willing to work co-operatively with the other delegations to ensure that a positive outcome is achieved at UNFF-7.