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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

Regional and subregional inputs**Letter dated 6 February 2009 from the Permanent Representatives of Australia and Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

The Permanent Missions of Australia and Switzerland to the United Nations present their compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and have the honor to transmit the enclosed letter from Mr. Bruno Oberle, Head of the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, and Mr. John Talbot, General Manager of the Forestry Branch of the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, as well as the enclosed report entitled "Australian — Swiss Region Led Initiative on Regional Input in Support of the United Nations Forum on Forests".

* E/CN.18/2009/1

In light of the importance of the report and its relevance to the work of the United Nations, particularly in the environmental field, we would appreciate if the present letter and the report were issued as an official document of the eighth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

The Permanent Missions of Switzerland and Australia to the United Nations avail themselves of this opportunity to renew the Secretary-General of the United Nations the assurances of their highest consideration.

(Signed) Robert **Hill**
Permanent Representative of
Australia to the United Nations

(Signed) Peter **Maurer**
Permanent Representative of
Switzerland to the United Nations

Annex to the letter dated 6 February 2009 from the Permanent Representatives of Australia and Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Letter dated 2 February 2009 from Mr. Bruno Oberle, Head of the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, and Mr. John Talbot, General Manager of the Forestry Branch of the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Australian — Swiss Region-Led Initiative on regional input in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests

We have the honor to inform you that the Australian — Swiss Region-Led Initiative on regional input in support of the United Nations Forum on Forest took place on 28-30 January 2008 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The specific objectives of the Region-Led initiatives were as follows:

- Raise awareness at the regional and sub-regional levels of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) and the role and work of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), especially its mandate to strengthen interaction between the UNFF and regional and sub-regional mechanisms, institutions and instruments, organisations and processes;

- Inform on the topics identified in the UNFF Multi Year Program of Work with a view to sharing regional and sub-regional perspectives on these topics with the UNFF;
- Examine opportunities for and constraints to integrating the planned UNFF agenda items into meetings of the regional or sub-regional processes;
- Identify practical mechanisms and timelines for ensuring that the outputs from regional meetings are submitted to the Forum secretariat and integrated into the UNFF sessions, as appropriate and likewise enhancing outputs from the global level to the regional level;
- Encourage inputs from forest-related regional and sub-regional mechanisms, institutions and instruments, organisations and processes to UNFF, by (1) sending written focused contributions; (2) and/or participating in the sessions of the UNFF.

Forty-nine participants from thirty-one organisations and countries attended the RLI. Participation was on invitation basis to forest-related regional and sub-regional organisations, Bureau members of the 8th Session of the UNFF, Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) members and selected country experts.

The final report captures the highlights of the deliberations undertaken during the Australian – Swiss Region Led Initiative on regional input in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests. It will be an important input to the work of the UNFF at its 8th session in April 2009.

We should be grateful if the Final Report could be issued as an official document of the 8th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

(Signed) John **Talbot**

General Manager
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Fisheries and Forestry

(Signed) Bruno **Oberle**

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Environment of Switzerland

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**Annex to the letter dated 2 February 2009 from Mr. Bruno Oberle,
Head of the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, and Mr.
John Talbot, General Manager of the Forestry Branch of the
Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Report of the Australian — Swiss Region Led Initiative on
Regional Input in Support of the United Nations Forum on Forests**

Geneva, Switzerland

28 – 30 January 2008

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---------|---|
| COMIFAC | Central African Forests Commission |
| CPF | Collaborative Partnership on Forests |
| ECOSOC | United Nations Economic and Social Council |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations |
| GOFs | Global Objectives on Forests |
| IAF | International Arrangement on Forests |
| MYPOW | Multi-Year Programme of Work |
| NLBI | Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests |
| RLI | Region-Led Initiative |
| SFM | Sustainable Forest Management |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNFF | United Nations Forum on Forests |

The Region-Led Initiative

1. The Region Led Initiative (RLI), co-hosted by the Governments of Australia and Switzerland, was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 28 – 30 January 2008. Forty nine participants from thirty one organisations and countries attended the RLI. Participation was on invitation basis to forest-related regional and sub-regional organisations, Bureau members of the 8th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) members and selected country experts.

2. The RLI was Co-Chaired by Ms. Sibylle Vermont and Mr. Macarthy Oyebo. Two working groups, (Co-chairs: Mr. Tony Bartlett and Mr. Carlos Aragon and Rapporteurs: Ms. Jerilyn Levi and Mr. Abdellah Benmellouk), discussed the following issues drawn from a background paper prepared for the meeting:

- Ways to enhance the integration of UNFF topics/matters into regional meetings;
- Key priorities/challenges of regional bodies and how these link to the topics of the UNFF sessions (including any other topic that would need to be added);

- Capacity to influence future UNFF deliberations (emerging issues, two-way process). What kind of outcome/decision/document from UNFF could contribute to improving Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) at the regional level; and
- Modalities for providing regional input to UNFF (What type of support is required to hold regional meetings to deal with UNFF agenda items; and to use reporting mechanisms to collect and organize input to UNFF?).

3. Discussions at the RLI focused primarily on enhancing contributions of regional and sub-regional organisations to the UNFF, but participants recognized the important role of regional and sub-regional organisations in facilitating implementation of action at the country level. The issue of country-level actions was not addressed specifically at the RLI, since it was linked to other elements such as means of implementation which are to be addressed at UNFF8.

Objectives of the RLI:

- Raise awareness at the regional and sub-regional levels of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) and the role and work of the UNFF, especially its mandate to strengthen interaction between the UNFF and regional and sub-regional mechanisms, institutions and instruments, organisations and processes;

- Inform on the topics identified in the UNFF Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) with a view to sharing regional and sub-regional perspectives on these topics with the UNFF;
- Examine opportunities for and constraints to integrating the planned UNFF agenda items into meetings of the regional or sub-regional processes;
- Identify practical mechanisms and timelines for ensuring that the outputs from regional and sub-regional organisation meetings are submitted to the Forum secretariat and integrated into the UNFF sessions, as appropriate and likewise enhancing outputs from the global level to the regional level; and
- Encourage inputs from forest-related regional and sub-regional mechanisms, institutions and instruments, organisations and processes to UNFF, by (1) sending written focused contributions; and/or (2) participating in the sessions of the UNFF.

Introduction

4. The purpose of the RLI was to promote, stimulate and enhance the contributions and participation of regional and sub-regional forest-related mechanisms, institutions and instruments, organisations and processes (hereafter referred to as regional and sub-regional organisations) in the UNFF's work, with a view to contribute to enhanced implementation of SFM. This was in response to UNFF member States agreeing that there should be a greater interaction

between the UNFF and the work being carried out by forest-related organisations and processes that operate at the regional and sub-regional level.

5. Regional and sub-regional organisations have been invited by the UNFF resolution 7/1 to address issues and agenda items planned for each UNFF session, to provide a concise summary of their deliberations to the UNFF Secretariat, and to contribute to the discussions of UNFF sessions.

Background

6. The latter half of the 20th century saw a marked decline in global forest cover as well as widespread forest degradation. The two ad hoc bodies of the United Nations established to address the problems – the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests – produced a wide range of proposals for action. However, only limited progress on the ground resulted, and the problem continued. In 2000, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), by Resolution 2000/35, decided that the main objective of the IAF is to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and strengthen long-term political commitment to this end. In order to achieve the objective and carry out the functions of the IAF ECOSOC established the UNFF, as an intergovernmental body of the Council.

7. Although the establishment of the IAF showed new promise of implementing SFM, early years of UNFF saw global policy dialogue continuing

to focus on the same issues without facilitating greater implementation of SFM. It became clear that a significant strengthening and improvement of the IAF was necessary to make it more effective at mobilizing political commitment to SFM and facilitating action on the ground.

8. In 2006 the IAF was strengthened through a new ECOSOC resolution - Resolution 2006/49 - with a new, focused approach to implementing internationally agreed actions towards SFM. It included four shared Global Objectives on Forests (GOFs) as well as three new principal functions for UNFF including one on regional/global interaction (ECOSOC 2006). At UNFF7 member States reached agreement on the Non Legally Binding Instrument (NLBI) on All Types of Forests and the new MYPOW. In December 2007, fifteen years after the adoption of the Forest Principles at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) and subsequent discussions on a global approach to protect the world's forests, the UN General Assembly adopted this landmark Instrument (GA Resolution 62/98). This was the culmination of nearly three years of intense negotiation

Key priorities and challenges of the regional and sub-regional organisations

9. The RLI provided an opportunity to share priorities and challenges faced by regional and sub-regional organisations, looking not only at ways to strengthen interactions with the UNFF, but also in implementing SFM generally.

It was clear that while many of these priorities and challenges were commonly shared; the individual nature of forests, the specific economic circumstances and political will of countries within each regional and sub-regional organisation strongly influence the priorities and operating modalities of each organisation.

10. Most regional and sub-regional organisations already include issues from the UNFF MYPOW on their agendas. However, there may be other discussions on topics associated with UNFF thematic issues and the timing of these discussions varies.

Key Priorities

11. While there was common agreement on the key global forest priorities, the timing and the ways of addressing those priorities were strongly dependant on the needs and capabilities of each region or sub-region.

12. The following issues were identified as areas of priority for regional and sub-regional organisations that were also of priority at the global and national level. Not all identified were priorities for every region or sub-region, but many were common across organisations:

- Implementation of SFM;
- Capacity building and information exchange;
- Mobilisation of all types of financing;

- Forests and Climate Change;
- Biofuels/bioenergy;
- Biodiversity conservation and protection;
- Water and forests;
- Combating illegal and unsustainable logging;
- Establishing partnerships among all stakeholders – strengthening multi sectoral linkages and engagement;
- Local communities use/access rights to the forests;
- Forest products trade and market reforms;
- Forest policy and institutional reform;
- Protected area management;
- Forests and health;
- Forest degradation;
- Deforestation; and
- Forests and poverty eradication

The challenges faced in SFM implementation

13. The following views were expressed by regional and sub-regional organisations:

14. Implementation at the national, regional and global level of forest related commitments, particularly those related to the achievement of the four GOFs:

- Translating high level policy into action is challenging. It is essential to promote understanding of the NLBI and MYPOW to facilitate action at the national level;
- National needs should determine the priorities of regional and sub-regional organisations and global fora; and
- Political will is important to move implementation forward.

15. While most regional and sub-regional organisations are aware of the MYPOW and the work of the UNFF, some regional organisations are under informed of the role and purpose of the UNFF.

16. Means of implementation were highlighted as a necessary condition for implementing SFM, particularly at the national level. Some expressed the need for providing financial resources, transfer of environmentally sound technology,

capacity building, education, research, governance and law enforcement, and exploring the potential of a funding mechanism.

- Mobilization of resources at all levels as well as international cooperation including Official Development Assistance was considered important; and
- Mobilization of national resources was considered important for the establishment of national financing strategies for SFM. All types of financing options should be explored at the national and international levels for funding SFM.

17. Regions are diverse - economically, socially, and environmentally - which influence discussions of specific regional and sub-regional organisations.

18. There is a clear need to get forestry issues onto the broader global and national development agendas and to integrate forests in national development plans and strategies.

- There is a need to further raise the profile of forestry issues within the UN system; and
- Better coordination between national focal points on forest related issues, and between decision makers outside the forest sector needs greater attention.

Integration of priorities at all levels

19. Forest-related issues are discussed at global, regional and national levels, often by a number of organisations or fora at each level and often with different focal points or country representatives at each discussion. To avoid duplication and possible conflicting outcomes there is a clear need for better communication, coordination and integration across the global, regional and national levels.

20. Many regional and sub-regional organisations have already taken steps and made great advances in integrating and coordinating efforts aimed at achieving SFM. These organisations can provide models to build on and adapt for other regional and sub-regional organisations. There will never be a 'one size fits all' approach, but experience sharing and information exchange between organisations can result in less duplication of efforts and better outcomes at all levels.

21. The following views were expressed by regional and sub-regional organisations:

22. Regional and sub-regional organisations could consider UNFF topics as appropriate, with a view to providing input to UNFF and facilitating the global dialogue.

23. Regional and sub-regional organisations can raise awareness of UNFF outcomes. For example, workshops could be held at the regional level, to increase awareness in SFM policy development and implementation.

24. Information exchange between regional and subregional organisations is beneficial to share experiences and lessons learned.

25. Regional and sub-regional organisations can play a role in facilitating cross-sectoral information sharing and integrating forest policy into other related policies.

26. Regional topics could be explored jointly at events such as: the 'Forest Weeks' proposed in the Asia Pacific and Europe; the Puenbo, Central American Commission on Environment and Development, Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission initiative meetings; the Near East Forestry Commission - African Forestry and Wildlife Commission joint meeting; and the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) meetings all to be held in 2008. (See Annex 4)

27. Contact points from regional and sub-regional organisations could facilitate communication and better links with the UNFF Secretariat.

28. The CPF member organisations could make their national and regional focal points known to assist in coordination and communication at the regional

and sub-regional level. A CPF meeting in February 2008 will look at better cooperation and coordination on a number of key forest issues.

Emerging Issues

29. A number of issues that were identified as key priorities for regional and sub-regional organisations were also discussed as potential emerging issues for future sessions of the UNFF. These included bioenergy and land use change, water and forests and environmental services for mobilisation of additional financial resources. The Bureau of the UNFF will consider in consultation with member States, CPF and other stakeholders, any emerging issues for each session of the Forum as stated in Section D of the MYPOW of the UNFF.

Interaction between the regional and sub-regional organisations and the UNFF

30. There is a history of interaction between many regional and sub-regional organisations and the UNFF, but there is also a common agreement that this interaction can be strengthened from both sides and in both directions. There is a strong interest from both the UNFF and from regional and sub-regional organisations to explore steps and actions to achieve this. The RLI provided a useful opportunity for regional and sub-regional organisations to learn more about the UNFF and how it operates as well as about activities in other regions. Using past experiences and lessons learned, a number of ways were identified to

improve interaction between regional and sub-regional organisations and the UNFF.

31. UNFF is an intergovernmental body, and the participants in UNFF are the official representatives of member States, representing the views and the policies of each one of their respective governments. Regional and sub-regional organisations are composed of diverse participants, with a wider range and larger number of forest practitioners and stakeholders present at the regional meetings than at global policy meetings. The composition of participants at the regional meetings compared to the global meetings creates a different dynamic for discussions. It is important to use this first cycle of regional and global meetings and interaction as a learning experience towards promoting greater exchange between regional and global levels.

How can the UNFF help the regional and sub-regional organisations?

32. The following views were expressed by regional and sub-regional organisations:

33. Exchange of information among regional and sub-regional organisations and knowledge sharing are important issues for capacity building.

- Most regional and sub-regional organisations have their own information sharing networks but there is no overall global library of information related to regional and sub-regional organisations;

- The UNFF Secretariat could disseminate information and data from relevant regional and sub-regional organisations through the UNFF website, and provide links to their respective sites to facilitate communication and coordination between these entities. For sub-regional cooperation, the UNFF Secretariat could offer support by sharing information and contacts; and
- The development of an events calendar of planned activities that could be made available on the UNFF website could be useful in providing deadlines for submissions and inputs into upcoming UNFF sessions (as outlined in the reporting section below).

34. New activities into the regional SFM agenda may require additional funding. The CPF could be asked to consider providing additional support to regional and sub-regional organisations for better synergies and coordination.

35. There is a need to support national focal points and strengthen capacity building to enhance communication and harmonization at all levels. This support could be enhanced through coordinated approaches with the CPF.

36. There is a need to devote one or two days in UNFF sessions to discussions on regional and sub-regional dimensions to allow regional and sub-regional organisations processes to present their perspectives, information and share experiences and best practices.

37. The member States of UNFF could organise and support events such as the RLI and side events at other fora to enhance the knowledge and awareness of organisations to the work of the UNFF.

How can the regional and sub-regional organisations help the UNFF?

38. The following views were expressed by regional and sub-regional organisations:

39. Regional and sub-regional organisations are aware of the MYPOW and the work of the UNFF. Most themes and sub-themes are on the agenda of these institutions, and some of them have integrated programs of work that include themes adopted by UNFF. However, the awareness of how the UNFF Secretariat and CPF members work, as well as knowledge of international forest policy decisions, varies at the regional level and could be enhanced through further interaction with the UNFF Secretariat.

40. Reports from regional and sub-regional organisations may help to complement national reporting as few UNFF member States submit voluntary country reports. Examples include the report on the State of Europe's Forests 2007 prepared jointly by the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, UN Economic Commission for Europe and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), and the COMIFAC report on progress in SFM implementation.

41. Regional and sub-regional organisations could organise activities related to the International Year of Forests to raise public awareness and engage political and public interest in SFM.

42. Regional and sub-regional organisations could promote implementation of action towards SFM at the ground level in member countries, in accordance with their mandates.

43. Regional and sub-regional organisations could use their technical expertise and experience to contribute to UNFF session deliberations.

44. Regional and sub-regional organisations could provide the UNFF Secretariat with a timetable and schedule of meetings each year for inclusion on the UNFF website.

45. Regional and sub-regional organisations could undertake collaborative programmes and organise workshops, seminars, and side events in conjunction with UNFF sessions to share information, seek advice and explore ideas:

- Participation in the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue held as part of the Forum sessions could provide an opportunity for regional and sub-regional organisations to benefit from the experiences of a range of stakeholders and as a platform to create synergies among all stakeholders; and

- Organising regional and subregional events during UNFF sessions could provide an opportunity to transmit regional experiences to other regions.

46. Regional and sub-regional organisations could provide regular feedback to UNFF on policy development, lessons learnt and regional priorities. This input would inform UNFF discussions in a manner that could be practical and useful to regional and sub-regional organisations.

Modalities for regional and sub-regional organisations input

47. The following views were expressed by regional and sub-regional organisations:

48. Each region and sub-region has a number of regional and sub-regional processes which result in a variety of methodologies and approaches. One size does not fit all and modalities will vary to best suit each organisation:

- Each organisation has its own mandate, intergovernmental process and priorities which will determine its ability to interact with UNFF.

49. There are valuable experiences from all the regional and sub-regional organisations that can be used as models or for lessons learnt for other regional and sub-regional organisations. The UNFF Secretariat could, through its website, share information on regional and sub-regional organisations, provide links to

successful models or examples of interaction and input by regional and sub-regional organisations into the UNFF.

50. Different regional and sub-regional organisations may need different methods of interaction with the UNFF:

- An option may be to ask regional and sub-regional organisations to discuss progress on the GOFs relevant to their work.

51. Having regional and sub-regional preparatory meetings of regional and sub-regional organisations before UNFF sessions could be considered as appropriate and helpful. As an example, the SFM Project I/II put together a technical support team to bring African delegates together prior to UNFF6 and UNFF7 to help African member states contribute to these UNFF sessions.

52. Timing is important. Intersessional work should support global meetings, with member States able to discuss issues and ideas at a regional and sub-regional level in time to provide input into the UNFF sessions and to promote closer interaction between regional/subregional organisations and the UNFF Secretariat.

53. UNFF can play a key role in supporting countries in gaining political support for implementing SFM at the national, regional and global levels

54. Time should be allocated in the UNFF session specifically for regional and sub-regional organisation focused discussions. This could include interactive panels which are proposed for UNFF8.

Reporting

55. Regional and sub-regional organisations were invited by the MYPOW of the Forum (Resolution 7/1 paragraph 7 and 8) to address issues and agenda items planned for each UNFF session, to provide a concise summary of their deliberations to the UNFF secretariat, and to contribute to the discussions of UNFF sessions.

56. The following views were expressed by regional and sub-regional organisations:

57. Need to avoid creating new reporting systems, but utilise existing processes to avoid burden on member States, regional and sub-regional organisations and the UNFF Secretariat:

- Many participants emphasised the need to avoid overlap and duplication for organisations which have their own program for reporting to specific governments and organisations (e.g. conventions and FAO). The CPF should continue enhancing coordination and cooperation with the forest related conventions and other relevant Intergovernmental Organisations

to get the required information on actions, plans, programs and measures.

58. FAO expertise, experience and reporting tools such as the Global Forest Resource Assessment and the State of the Forests report could be used by UNFF for reporting.

59. Assistance from the UNFF may be useful and the development of guidance on reporting to UNFF was suggested by some participants.

- A clear timeline showing reporting deadlines for input into UNFF sessions could also be developed by the UNFF Secretariat and made available.

60. Need to strengthen and streamline reporting mechanisms on the state of forests in all regional and sub-regional organisations of the world was highlighted. FAO and other CPF members could take the lead in assisting regional and sub-regional organisations with technical assistance and capacity building.

Conclusion

61. This RLI provided an excellent opportunity to exchange information and ensure closer interaction at all levels.

62. The RLI explored and highlighted several benefits from enhanced regional interaction.

63. Participants voiced their interest in working together to make progress on SFM globally.

64. Participants expressed their gratitude to the Governments of Australia and Switzerland for organising the RLI and encouraged other countries and regional and sub-regional organisations to organise future RLIs.

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