

Australia's statement on Item 5: Emerging Issues: Impacts of COVID-19 on Forests and Forest Sector

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land that we are engaging with you from today, the Ngunnawal people, and I would also like to acknowledge the importance of this country to the Ngambri people. I pay my respects to their elders, past, present, and emerging.

Australia thanks the Secretariat for the work on the preliminary COVID-19 analysis, and notes the key outcomes and recommendations provided in the relevant paper. As the pandemic progresses, we continue to see many of those issues intensify regionally and globally, creating many challenges for forest management, forest supply chains, and the communities that rely on forests.

In particular, we have heard recently of challenges in managing legal and sustainable forestry activities, and the transfer of materials into the supply chain. Since 2012, Australia has taken a strong approach toward combatting illegal logging and associated trade; laws which support the delivery of the Global Forest Goals. However, due to the pandemic there is perhaps a heightened risk that this activity will inhibit our progress and believe that further coordinated and consistent global action against illegal logging is required in the years ahead.

In moving forward the work of the Forum on COVID-19, we support the proposal to undertake a second assessment, however we believe it is quite premature to engage with a follow up study at this moment. We consider that the value of a repeat study would lay in considering the longer-term and lingering impacts of COVID-19 on SFM, however believe that such a study is at least two years away.

Australia also notes and thanks the Secretariat for the background paper on fire. As many would be aware, in 2019-20 we faced one of our most challenging summers where around 8.5 million hectares of forest was burnt in Southern and Eastern Australia. We thank all members who reached out and offered support to us during that challenging time.

While fire is a necessary landscape component supporting ecosystem function and natural regeneration processes, this was an unprecedented event with devastating impact. Therefore, work that focuses on the issues of inappropriate fire regimes represents an area of increasing interest for us, particular in working with traditional owners on landscape and fuel management. Australia has allocated significant funding toward recovery from the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, including \$200 million towards wildlife recovery, but the road to recovery will take some time.

Thank you.