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JOINT FAO/ECE WORKING PARTY ON FOREST ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
Twenty-second session, 26-28 May 1999

**Experience with the joint FAO/ECE/Eurostat/ITTO
forest products questionnaire**

(Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda)

Note by the secretariat

This document briefly describes the objectives and functioning of the system for cooperation in collection and distribution of statistics between UN/ECE, FAO, Eurostat and ITTO, whereby each piece of information is requested only once from each country then shared between the four organisations. The new joint questionnaire, which has been completely overhauled is attached to the document. The Working Party is invited to review the questionnaire and the process and make suggestions for improvement.

1. It has been recognised for many years, indeed from the foundation of Timber Committee/EFC cooperation, that both organisations and countries benefited from joint data collection and dissemination systems. ECE and FAO have cooperated in this way for about 50 years now: Eurostat joined the system in the mid 1990s with the development of a joint questionnaire. In 1998, the Council of the International Tropical timber Organisation (ITTO) agreed that ITTO should also join the cooperative system. Members of the four secretariats met in Yokohama in September 1998 and Geneva in January 1999. This document briefly presents the results of this cooperation and invites the Working Party to review activities and make comments and suggestions for the direction of future work.

2. In view of the generally very positive reaction to this cooperation, the secretariats felt that it was appropriate to implement the joint questionnaire without delay, in early 1999 (data for 1997-1998), and then to correct formats and processes in the light of experience, rather than incurring a long delay while obtaining approval for the joint questionnaire.

3. It also became apparent that the original joint questionnaire had not been properly overhauled for many years, so its format was reviewed in detail during the interagency discussions. The joint questionnaire is appended to the present document for the Working Party's consideration. The joint questionnaire is being sent also in electronic form to national correspondents, which should streamline their work, and that of the secretariats.

Principles and methods of cooperation

4. The basic principle in the four-organisation, as before in the three-organisation questionnaire, is that each item of information should be requested only once from each country and thereafter shared between the organisations. Each organisation continues to use the information it receives according to its own mandate¹, which is, of course, completely unchanged by practical cooperation in data collection. Thus there is only one correspondent for forest sector statistics in each country and he/she only fills in one form, which is sent to one address only. The data is then shared between all four organisations, which are also able to focus their data validation efforts on a limited number of countries, trusting their partners to work with other countries.

¹ One consequence of this system is that occasionally organisations will request information which they will not use themselves, but only pass on to their partners.

5. The structure of the joint questionnaire is as follows:

- JQ1, JQ2 Basic questionnaire for all countries on removals, production and trade
- EU1, EU2 For EU and EFTA countries, requesting data on removals by species and intra-EU and extra-EU trade
- DOT1, DOT2 Direction of trade, for non-ECE countries²
- ITTO1, ITTO2 ITTO3
For ITTO members, requesting data on trade in tropical species, and on market conditions and forecasts.
- ECE1 For ECE members requesting more detailed information on trade by temperate species.

6. The Geneva secretariat will distribute the questionnaire to all ECE countries who will receive the questionnaires as follows:

- JQ: all countries
ECE: all ECE countries
ITTO: all ECE members of ITTO
EU: all EU and EFTA members (candidates to the EU will also be requested to fill in this questionnaire).

7. Data validation/dialogue with correspondents will be carried out by Eurostat for EU/EFTA countries, and by ECE/FAO for all other ECE members. Eurostat, FAO and ITTO will receive from ECE/FAO Geneva all the data for their respective members in the ECE region for inclusion in their respective publications.

8. The attention of Working Party delegates is also drawn to the fact that it became necessary during the overhaul of the questionnaire to agree on certain terms and definitions, as well as a system of cross references to international multi-sector classifications. Delegates are invited to review the joint questionnaire with particular care from this point of view as the questionnaire, through its concepts and use of terms is, in effect, setting the framework for all international analysis of developments in the sector: it is of the highest importance that this framework be coherent and realist.

9. The Working Party's views on these matters will be reported to the appropriate bodies of the other organisations, who will also be invited to review the joint questionnaire. In autumn 1999, a revised version will be prepared for use in 2000 and subsequent years, taking into account all the comments made. The Working Party will be invited to comment again on the functioning of the joint questionnaire at its next session, in 2001.

² For ECE countries, this information is derived from general trade data sets, notably COMTRADE.

Annex
Joint FAO/ECE/Eurostat/ITTO questionnaire.