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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION
European Forestry Commission

JOINT FAO/ECE WORKING PARTY ON FOREST ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS

Twenty-third session, 14-16 May 2001

Inter-organization co-operation on forest and forest products statistics

(Item 6 of the Provisional Agenda)

The present document informs the Working Party of the Intersecretariat Working Group's (IWG) activities and invites the Working Party to comment on them, and make suggestions for the direction of future work.

Introduction

1. Since the mid-1990s cooperation between international organisations in the field of statistics for the forest and forest products sector has become more intensive and structured, notably in the framework of the Intersecretariat Working Group (IWG) on Forest Sector Statistics. The objectives are twofold:
 - To provide a better service to users of statistics; and
 - To collect and disseminate the statistics more efficiently, thus reducing the burden to secretariats and countries alike.
2. The present document informs the Working Party of the IWG's activities and invites the Working Party to comment on them, and make suggestions for the direction of future work.

Meetings of the Intersecretariat Working Group

3. Since the last session of the Working Party, the IWG has met four times:
 - 25 May 1999, Geneva (in conjunction with the Working Party session)
 - 1-2 February 2000, Luxembourg (shortly before the Eurostat Working Party on forestry statistics)
 - 9 October 2000, Rome (in conjunction with joint session of the Timber Committee and EFC)
 - 15-16 February 2001, Rome
4. Most sessions have been attended by the agencies responsible for the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire (ECE, FAO, Eurostat and ITTO), sometimes with participation of other DGs of the Commission (Agriculture, Enterprise and Environment), EEA and OECD.

Joint FAO/ECE/Eurostat/ITTO Forest Sector Questionnaire (JFSQ)

5. Over the last two years, the IWG has focused on the development and implementation of the JFSQ, which was reviewed by the Working Party at its 1999 session. The 2001 questionnaire has been circulated to national correspondents for reply and may be downloaded from the Timber Committee website¹ so is not reproduced here. However, the main developments over the past two years (since the first version, which was radically overhauled when ITTO joined the system) are briefly summarised below.
 - As regards the **questionnaire and definitions**, the changes are listed in document TIM/EFC/WP.2/4 on collection and dissemination of statistics.
6. In the last year, the secretariats have paid increased attention to harmonising **data validation and estimation procedures and clarifying channels of communication**, as differing approaches in these areas were introducing discrepancies between the four data bases, even though they were all based on the same original data. In 2001, the four agencies will each apply, to "their" countries²:

¹ <http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/mis/jfsq/2001/>

² In summary, EU/EFTA for Eurostat, other ECE countries for ECE/FAO, ITTO producers and Japan for ITTO and the rest of the world for FAO Rome

- common validation procedures, notably to ensure internal consistency of totals, and between questionnaire sheets, check trade unit values, identify sudden and inexplicable year-to-year changes, negative apparent consumption etc.;
- changes to be made by lead agency, in consultation with national correspondent, and then transmitted to other agencies;
- common approaches to estimating missing data, or data which failed the above-mentioned validation tests
- detailed dialogue with national correspondents about long term series;
- research funded by the EU (Eurostat) and carried out by EFI into the methods used by countries to collect production and trade data and transmit the information, and especially evaluating discrepancies between different trade data sources (COMEXT, COMTRADE and the joint questionnaire);
- agreed timetable for whole process; improvement of the timetable for countries and between agencies.

7. **Data sharing processes** (between agencies and with national correspondents) are also being developed and improved. The standard form for submitting data is the Excel spreadsheet version of the questionnaire (although some countries still submit information on paper), and Eurostat has developed an Internet based tool for dissemination and workgroup communication while FAO uses a web-based system in certain circumstances.

8. After validation, Eurostat transmits data for EU and EFTA countries to Geneva in time for use in the *Forest Products Annual Market Review* and the relevant issue of the *Timber Bulletin* “*Forest Products Annual Market Review*” and the *Timber Bulletin* “*Forest Products Statistics*”. In addition to printed distribution, the TIMBER database in Geneva is available on diskette and on the Market Information Service (MIS) of the Timber Committee website³. Other forest products statistics are also available on the MIS, for example the latest issues of these *Timber Bulletins*: “Forest Products Statistics,” “Forest Products Prices,” “Forest Products Markets in 2000 and Prospects for 2001.” Twice a year (June and December) ECE/FAO directly uploads data for all ECE countries to the FAOSTAT database in Rome, on which the FAO Forestry Department website is based, as well as the *Yearbook of Forest Products*. Information is also published in the Eurostat Forestry Statistics publication and the ITTO “Annual Review and Assessment of the World Timber Situation.”

9. The four data bases should be harmonised, avoiding, or at least minimising, the confusing discrepancies between them. Initial efforts will concentrate on recent years (say 1998 on), but ultimately the whole series from 1960 should be validated.

10. The IWG members believe that their cooperation is enabling each agency to concentrate its resources in their areas of comparative advantage and thus provide a better overall service to the community at large.

11. The Working Party is invited to comment on the methods of interagency cooperation used for the JFSQ and suggest improvements.

³ <http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/mis/mis/htm>

Next steps

12. The mandate of the IWG is not restricted to those data covered by the JFSQ, although the four agencies participating in JFSQ have given that work priority. These data, with the forest resource assessment work, represent the core data set for international understanding of trends. The four agencies together have a responsibility to the international community, as these data are not reliably collected through other channels. However, it may be expected that, as the measures decided to improve JFSQ are implemented, and data quality improves, operating the JFSQ system will become more routine and the IWG itself may not need to devote so much time to developing new systems.

13. Two other activities have been carried out by the IWG:

- Co-ordination with OECD of forestry input to the OECD state of the environment enquiry.
- Identification of “next generation data needs”, as discussed by the Working Party in 1999 (see TIM/EFC/WP.2/1999/6, annex, and the discussion in TIM/EFC/WP.2/2001/4).

14. The Working Party is invited to comment on the IWG’s activities and in particular to consider whether there is a need for intersecretariat co-ordination of activities in other areas.

Possible areas could include:

- **Capacity building for collecting and improving information systems for the forest and forest products sector.**
- **Harmonising data supply, at an international level, on indicators of sustainable forest management as drawn up by the various regional processes (for example the MCPFE).**
- **Contributing to inter-organisation cooperation on forest resources statistics.**
- **Contributing to inter-organisation cooperation on certification and certified forest products statistics.**