

DRAFT

Intersecretariat Working Group on forest and forest products statistics

Report of first meeting, 8 December 1994

Introduction

1. The Intersecretariat Working group (IWG) held its first meeting at the Palais des Nations, Geneva on 8 December 1994. present were Messrs P. Calo (EUROSTAT, Luxembourg), R. Flies (DGVI, responsible for the EFICS programme, Brussels), P. Wardle (FAO Rome), C. Prins, A. Korotkov and C. Huybrechts (FAO/ECE, Geneva).

2. OECD and ITTO were invited to attend, but did not do so. The IWG agreed that they should be kept fully informed of all developments and invited to future meetings, with a view to achieving maximum intersecretariat cooperation in the field of forest and forest products statistics.

Background

3. The IWG noted that as a result of the increased political visibility of forest issues in recent years, there was a profusion of new international initiatives and programmes. There is a strongly increased demand for information and the risk of unnecessary duplication of international activities. New techniques (e.g. remote sensing) and new fields of study (e.g. climate modelling) had brought new information needs, new potentials, and new user and provider communities. It was for the international secretariats to take the initiative to coordinate activities, with the primary aim of preparing the best possible international data base, at the least cost to the secretariats and to data suppliers, while fully corresponding to users' needs.

4. As a general rule, in order to minimise the reporting burden, which is heavy at present, and to avoid any confusion which could arise from discrepancies in information provided by different international organisations:

- no information should be requested twice from the same country for international use; and
- the same figure should be quoted for the same transaction in all international data sets.

5. The main elements of a strategy in this regard are:

- consultation before requesting information, notably through the IWG;
- single questionnaires, serving the needs of all organisations;
- sharing of data by the organisations;
- a common framework of classifications and definitions at the global level, with the possibility for more detailed work at regional levels, maintaining the broad categories of the global classification;
- make full use of established systems before setting up new ones.

Annual questionnaire on removals production and trade of forest

products

6. The IWG proposed there should be a common (FAO/ECE/EUROSTAT) questionnaire to collect this information in all regions of the world, based on the existing FAO/ECE questionnaire which already had global coverage and had been well tested in practice over a long period.

7. The sequence proposed is as follows:

- spring 1995: consultation of EU members as to whether the existing FAO/ECE questionnaire fits their needs;
- detailed proposal for the session of the FAO/ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics in June 1995;
- finalisation of questionnaire and arrangements for distribution of questionnaires and processing of data by end 1995;
- January 1996, circulation of questionnaire, requesting data for 1995 (deadline 1 April 1996).

8. The IWG noted that the FAO/ECE system had evolved to meet the tight deadlines associated with the necessity to prepare an annual market review in July each year. This is possible through the extended use of national contacts. The new system must perform at least as well as the present one with regard to completeness and punctuality of replies. To achieve this, the following procedure was proposed:

- January circulation of questionnaire (with FAO, ECE and EUROSTAT logos) by EUROSTAT to EU members, by FAO/ECE to ECE non-EU members, and by FAO to non-ECE countries.
- April: deadline for replies (EU and ECE); reminders by circulating organisations;
- transmission of raw data for EU countries by EUROSTAT to FAO/ECE by 1 June;
- June/July checking and processing of data by Geneva in conjunction with preparation of market review;
- early August (when review and Timber Bulletin finalised), transmission of checked data (ECE members), on diskette by Geneva to Rome and Luxembourg.

9. The process should be reviewed after the first year by the IWG in the light of experience.

Information on the forest resource

10. All agreed on the importance of the global forest resource assessment process, which should be based on a common classification and definitions agreed on after a comprehensive process of consultation with all interested parties. FAO/ECE, through a team of specialists was responsible for the temperate and boreal assessment 2000. EUROSTAT and EFICS were invited to take part in the team's activities, with a view to strengthening EU participation and encouraging the application in the EU of global concepts.

11. EFICS could make a significant contribution to the global process while at the same time improving forest resource information for EU countries, by carrying out a study on national concepts and methods and the international comparability of forest resource data for EU countries. This study could:

- carry out a detailed comparative analysis of national practice in the field of forest inventory;

- analyse the methods used to adapt national data to international definitions;
 - draw up proposals and recommendations to be submitted to the competent bodies as regards definitions and classifications, taking into account national practices and present internationally agreed terms and definitions.
- Flies will transmit draft terms of reference for the study for comment to Geneva and Rome in the near future.

12. The IWG stressed the necessity of concentrating resources and reflection in the existing global process managed by FAO, which was at this stage very open to suggestions as to how it should adapt to the changed circumstances. The emergence of competing international forest resource efforts should be prevented, as this was bound to lead to inefficient use of scarce resources and deterioration in the comparability of international data.

Other matters

13. The IWG was informed that consultations on forest fire statistics between FAO, FAO/ECE, EU and other interested organisations would be held in spring 1995. The IWG should be kept informed of developments.

14. The IWG noted that there is a need to help the countries in transition to rebuild effective information systems in the forest sector in their new circumstances, drawing on the experience of market economies, by means of workshops and training courses or study visits/exchanges. The IWG could play a role in leading this effort (mentioned in Helsinki resolution H3), taking initiatives, bringing experts together and mobilising funding.

Future activities

15. The IWG should meet about twice a year, in Geneva, Rome, Luxembourg or Brussels as convenient. Meetings could be scheduled with other statistical meetings to facilitate participation. The next IWG meeting should be in Geneva just before the Working Party meeting in June 1995.