DRAFT SPEAKING NOTE

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Links between the strategy and EU agricultural competitiveness and sustainability and food security

➢ Maintaining biodiversity and avoiding the degradation of ecosystems cannot be done without farmers and forest owners. As stated in the Strategy, they are the "*guardians of our land*".

➢ However, food and raw materials production should not enter into competition with provision of environmental services, such as biodiversity. These important roles can in fact co-exist.

➢ Although, we agree that we need to increase our ambition as regards biodiversity and environmental protection, we are afraid that the top down approach proposed by the Biodiversity Strategy will not reach this ambition and the green recovery.

➢ European framers, forest owners and their cooperatives, are already facing a number of challenges in order to provide safe and nutritious food and renewable raw materials to European citizens and industry:
  o COVID-19 crisis – which only emphasised the importance of food security;
  o Negative impacts of climate change – which are leading to extreme weather conditions, spread of Invasive Alien Species, pests and diseases;
  o Land abandonment – where 11% of agricultural land is under the risk of abandonment until 2030. This is a threat to biodiversity (to plants and pollinators); and
  o Generation renewal – in 2016 only 11% of farm managers in the EU were young farmers under the age of 40;

➢ After the publication of the ambitious Biodiversity Strategy it was clear that the consequences of the proposed targets on the EU agricultural competitiveness, sustainability and food security will be significant.

➢ We were therefore surprised with the lack of accompanying overall impact assessment.

- ➢ It is because the targets aim to:
    - o Reduce the land available for agriculture and forestry – with goals to set aside 10% of agricultural land, protect more areas, have higher restrictions for the areas already protected and strictly protect 10% of EU land;
    - o Significantly reduce the amount of inputs used – without mentioning the need for alternatives that are safe, effective and affordable for farmers. These reductions will lead to lower yields, higher imports and food prices.
    - o The overall agricultural production could drop by more than 10%, impacting the exports and GDP. The EU would therefore be outsourcing its environmental footprint to other countries by shifting the production from more productive land in Europe to on average less productive land in other parts of the world and to the countries that have a significantly higher proportion of intact nature compared to the EU (leading to a decrease in tropical forest areas, reduced carbon stocks, and higher greenhouse gas emissions outside of Europe).
- ➢ It is therefore clear that the consequences will be significant.

- ➢ How to proceed:
    - o Framers, forest owners and their cooperatives should be seen as partners. These actors should be motivated and not discouraged.
    - o Thus, positive incentives and voluntary bottom-up processes should be prioritized in implementation.
    - o Disproportionate restrictions impacting food security and the sustainability of the sector must not be introduced without proper alternatives and a careful impact assessment.
    - o All economic sectors and consumers will have to play their part. This is a task for society as a whole.

- ➢ We can only hope that the Commission will realise that the strength of the European agriculture and forestry lies in its diversity. The final goal of the strategy should not be less agriculture, but rather more sustainable agriculture and forestry in the EU.
- ➢ It is because, sustainable and effective management of natural processes is of the utmost importance for maintaining biodiversity.
- ➢ We hope that this will be acknowledged by the Commission, as well as the Parliament in its upcoming reports on the Strategy.