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#### NOTE

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From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council of 26 May 2025: Meeting of Directors General for Forests (Warsaw, 13-15 May 2025) <i>- Information from the Presidency</i>

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From 13 to 15 May 2025, an informal meeting of the EU Forest Directors-General was held as part of the Polish Presidency. The discussion part of the meeting took place in Warsaw and Sękocin Stary, while the field visit was held at the "Natolin Forest" nature reserve and at the Chojnów Forest District. The main topic of the meeting was **strengthening forest resilience through biodiversity protection**, in the context of opportunities and challenges.

Delegations from 26 EU Member States participated in the meeting, along with representatives of stakeholders: European Forest Institute (EFI), European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR), Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF), European farmers' organisation COPA-COGECA, the ecological and social organization FERN), as well as the European Commission.

The discussion session was preceded by presentations on Poland's approach to the main topic, as well as case studies from Lithuania and Finland. Delegations, stakeholders, and the European Commission took part in the discussion, which was conducted in a tour-de-table format.

The discussion emphasized that **biodiversity plays a key role in strengthening forest resilience**, offering many options for forest management. Different approaches to biodiversity protection were also noted. The need to balance and integrate various approaches to forestry, including biodiversity protection and sustainable active forest management, was highlighted. In this context, the need to ensure flexibility in forest management, considering local conditions and integrating biodiversity protection with forestry, was emphasized. The importance of forest health for providing ecosystem services, landscape-level forest management, and close-to-nature forestry was also underlined. The significant role of the European Network INTEGRATE in promoting the integration of nature protection with forestry and cooperation within ProSilva was pointed out. The importance of the sustainable forest management concept developed within Forest Europe and collaboration within the Forest Risk Facility was also emphasized.

It was stressed that **ensuring an appropriate balance in forest management is crucial to enhance forest resilience while maintaining high productivity**.

There are considerable **opportunities** in developing cooperation between political decision-makers and practitioners, fostering dialogue with stakeholders, strengthening research, and using scientific achievements, new technologies, and innovations. Building potential through training, advisory services, and approaches tailored to local conditions was also noted. The role of the Common Agricultural Policy and EU projects (e.g., LIFE) was identified as an opportunity. The need to protect genetic resources and facilitate migration, use native species, enhance natural regeneration, ensure species and age diversity in forests, apply small retention, promote mixed-age stands, utilize high-quality data, strengthen ecosystem services (e.g., tourism), gradually change forest species composition, and increase the share of broadleaved species was pointed out.

**Challenges** included increasing the involvement of private forest owners, changing local conditions due to climate change and their consequences (e.g., forest dieback, wind damage, forest fires, diseases, bark beetles, land abandonment, invasive species), financial burdens (the need for financial compensation for forest owners), the need to improve communication between the forestry sector and all stakeholders, and sometimes conflicting expectations regarding forests. Difficulties in developing biodiversity indicators and the need for flexibility was also pointed out. The issue of "nature credits" and ecosystem payments can also be a challenge if they do not take into account the needs of forest owners and local conditions.

The **field program** included a presentation of two different approaches to forest management: passive biodiversity protection in the Natolin Forest reserve and adaptive forest management in the Chojnów Forest District. During the field part, the role of protected areas in the context of climate change, the importance of science and research for forest protection, possibilities for strengthening biodiversity in managed forests, and challenges related to changing public expectations regarding forests were discussed.

On 15 May 2025, at the National Stadium in Warsaw, a **joint session of directors for nature and forestry** was held to present different approaches to implementing the Nature Restoration Law (NRL). This was the first joint meeting of the nature and forestry directors in many years, showing how important mutual understanding of the issues identified by different parties is.

The **nature panel focused on urban ecosystems**, with representatives from the European Commission, the Ministry of Ecological Transformation of France, UNESCO, and the Office of the Capital City of Warsaw, presenting their approaches to implementing NRL in urban areas. The panel discussion focused on the challenges and strategies related to the implementation of the Nature Restoration Law in cities, especially in the context of urban ecosystems. Various approaches were discussed, including the flexible adaptation of regulations to different levels of governance and the importance of collaboration with scientists and local stakeholders. The need for data collection, the creation of ambitious territorial strategies, and ensuring adequate funding to achieve biodiversity and urban climate adaptation goals was also emphasized. It was pointed out that the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the context of agroforestry for areas adjacent to cities could be helpful for financing. The discussion emphasized that there are different strategies and approaches to implementing NRL. Flexibility, collaboration, and adapting approaches on various management levels are key.

The **forestry panel discussed the implementation of NRL in forest ecosystems**. Representatives from the State Forests of Poland, the European Commission, the ecological organization FERN, and the European Forest Institute participated in the panel. The panel discussion focused on the challenges related to implementing forest ecosystem restoration goals under the NRL law, with particular emphasis on the role of indicators such as deadwood, and the need for involvement from various stakeholders, including the private sector. The importance of collaboration with foresters, education, and transparency in the implementation of plans was highlighted, especially concerning private forest owners who constitute a significant portion of forested areas in Europe. The need for long-term goals, which will be continued through successive terms of member state governments, was emphasized, as well as the role of financing in achieving these goals, with the possibility of securing funding from both public and private sectors. The discussion pointed out the shared need to restore forest ecosystems, despite the different approaches of various parties. It was emphasized that effective dialogue with stakeholders is one of the key actions for successfully implementing the NRL regulation.

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