

United Nations Forum on Forests

Open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group (AHEG2) established pursuant to paragraph 48,
ECOSOC resolution 2015/33

Submission – Australia

Australia thanks the Co-Chairs for providing the membership with the opportunity to comment on the Building Blocks/ Options for the 2017-2030 Strategic Plan of the International Arrangement on Forests and the Quadrennial Programme of Work for the period 2017-2020.

(1) Building Blocks/ Options for the 2017-2030 Strategic Plan of the International Arrangement on Forests

Australia acknowledges the considerable effort made by the consultants in ensuring that that Building Block/Options for the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests is truly reflective of the international consensus on forests and accurately reflects the forestry-specific international agreements currently in place.

Further, Australia recognises the challenges in condensing this information into a streamlined document whilst ensuring that key concept, agreements and targets are reported in a logical fashion.

We also appreciate that the resulting 2017-2030 Strategic Plan of the International Arrangements on Forests must both acknowledge and ensure the accurate inclusion of the above noted forestry-specific international agreements.

General Comments

Australia is concerned that the document lacks a narrative voice to clearly link this information into a broader strategy. The verbatim inclusion of forests and forestry-specific international agreement text with sporadic commentary lacks a unifying theme, is very text dense with little explanatory narrative, impacting upon the document's readability.

We would recommend that the drafters consider removing all wholesale 'slabs' of agreement-specific text from document, opting instead to place referenced agreements in the appendices, to improve readability and overall document flow.

In tandem with this, the drafters should consider the overall structure or 'order' of the document. For example, the section explaining the role and function of the UNFF appears on page 17 of the

document, well after in-depth analysis of how the UNFF should engage with a plethora of international agreements and organizations. It is this latter section, pages 17 to 23 which clearly articulate the 'who/why/how' of this strategy and its insertion at the end means readers must wade through dense agreement text for getting to the core of the strategy.

In addition, greater consideration could be giving the narrative text that 'links' each section to provide a shorter, more purposeful document which distils core information succinctly and with clear linkages.

Specific Comments

(a) C. Opportunities for Enhanced Action (pg 4) – third dot point

Australia suggests that the reference to SDG 15 as “an opportunity for enhanced action” be expanded to recognise that whilst SDG 15 is forest-focused, these themes cross many other SDGs and that an integrated approach is required to ensure that the cross-cutting nature of this SDG is meaningfully addressed.

(b) C. Opportunities for Enhanced Action (pg 4-5) – final dot point on GEF (Global Environment Facility)

Australia does not believe that the GEF replenishment process should serve as a means to seek/obtain additional funds for any specific sector; nor establish the GEF as a financial mechanism for additional MEAs/instruments.

The Strategy may benefit from highlighting the need to work with Conventions (for which the GEF is a financial mechanism) and with aligned agencies to ensure that sustainable forest management priorities are appropriately reflected in funding needs assessments, projects and so forth.

Further, references to the access of GEF resources should include '*as appropriate*' or '*in line with the GEF's mandate*' acknowledging the scope the GEF.

(c) C. Opportunities for Action (pg 5) – final dot point on GEF

See comments above.

(d) II. IAF vision - options (pg 5)

Australia considers that the IAF mission statement must clearly link to the UNFFs core functions in relation to sustainable forest management, so a reference to sustainable management (as outlined in option 1 and option 2) is preferred.

(e) B. Mission statement options (pg 6)

Australia wonders if there is a possibility of combining some of the discrete threads presented in the individual options into a slightly broader, yet still concise option. We note that some options make reference to the 2030 Agenda (possibly to the exclusion of other agreements). Consistent with our comments above, Australia considers the implementation of sustainable forest management to be at the core of the mission statement.

(f) A. Options for strategic approach/global goals/objectives/targets (pg 7)

At this stage, Australia has no express comment on this options presented as we consider that these elements will flow from what is decided in the vision/mission.

(g) B. Options for global targets/deliverables (pg 8-10)

In respect of the proposal to identify quantifiable targets/deliverables, the IAF needs to be mindful of the criteria and indicators that would be required to report on these in a meaningful and accurate manner. Australia emphasises the need to minimise, and where possible reduce, the reporting burden on Members and to utilise existing criteria and processes (such as the Montreal Process) wherever possible.

Option 2 / Examples (pg 11) – second last dot point

Australia queries the appropriateness of the UNFF's efforts to unilaterally establish joint initiatives with other bodies, so this should not be included as an operational target / deliverable.

(h) IV Implementation framework (pg 12)

Australia notes that timber legality/illegal logging is not expressly mentioned in the thematic priorities proposed at AHEG1. While it can be argued that these themes might be incorporated into other elements included in the draft list (eg governance/market and trade), given that illegal logging is referenced in other aspects of the draft there may be value in having it included in the thematic priorities.

(i) A. Actions to achieve global goals/objectives/targets/strategic approach (pg 12/13)

While recognising that the list has been drafted to be inclusive (depending on what ultimately forms the goals/objectives etc), Australia notes that any list of actions should only seek to include the highest agreed priorities. If the list of actions is too expansive it risks the possible distortion of effort towards actions that are of less priority/impact.

(j) B. Roles and responsibilities (pg 16)

Australia suggests that the description of the core functions of the UNFF be elevated to earlier in the document (as it is relevant to the development of the Strategic Plan). We also suggest that much of the detail regarding the roles of other bodies could be described in brief summary form (with the detail to be included in Appendices as needed).

(k) C.2 GEF, GCF and other Forest Funding Institution (pg 21) - first dot point

Australia believes that the UNFF Secretariat should consider exploring the potential for improved collaboration with the GEF Secretariat prior considering any invitation establish a new focal area and to provide additional finance (including an implied financial mechanism role).

(l) C.2 GEF, GCF and other Forest Funding Institution (pg 21) - first dot point

Australia believes that advising member states to *'make full use of resources under the GCF' and 'funding sources including payments for environmental services schemes and the UNFCCC carbon pricing mechanisms'* may not be overly helpful given widespread acknowledgement that many states have no capacity to successfully access funds.

This text may benefit from some additional wording, reflecting the role which member states can share to help expertise to help build the capacity of others to be able to access such funds and schemes.

(m) V. Review Framework (pg 23)

Consistent with our earlier comments on reporting against goals and deliverables, in respect of the proposal to establish a cycle and format for voluntary national reporting, Australia emphasises the need to utilise existing processes and minimise the reporting burden on Member countries.

(n) Progress in Implementing the UNFI (pg 24) - first dot point

Australia recommends that the UNFF Secretariat consider exploring the potential for resources with the GEF and other forest funding institutions, as relevant to their respective mandates.

ii) the Quadrennial Programme of Work for the period 2017-2020 (4POW)

Australia appreciates the efforts of the drafting committee in preparing the Quadrennial Programme of Work for the period 2017-2020 and appreciates the challenges in drafting the work plan whilst the accompanying strategy paper remains outstanding.

Australia, noting the work undertaken on the Programme of Work 2017-2020, believes that this document really needs to be developed concurrently with the Strategy to ensure its relevance in relation to content and deliverables.

The illustrative format text as provided goes some way to providing a linkage between the higher level strategy and the real world deliverables, however the points noted above remain relevant.