

Europe's Club du Bois: A foundation for jobs, growth, and climate goals?

Written by Maria Noichl MEP on 12 January 2015



Last September, as part of their activities in the club, the European panel federation (EPF), the European organisation of the sawmill industry (EOS) and the European confederation of woodworking industries (CEI-Bois) hosted the 'Wood action days' in front of the European parliament.

The event drew interest from over 40 MEPs and brought attention to the contribution wood could make to European sustainable and inclusive growth, namely that wood represents a long-term, environmentally sound and encompassing approach that reaches 56 per cent of the EU population living in rural communities.

As it stands now, the woodworking and furniture industry is the EU's fifth largest manufacturing industry, creating €218bn for the European economy and generating over two million jobs, particularly in rural areas.

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Given this great potential, it is my pleasure to announce that from 2015, I will take the reins as president of the newly revitalised Club du Bois. The role will be an outlet for my interest in forestry and agriculture issues which began during my childhood in Rosenheim, a wooden town known worldwide for its university, its craftsmen and the highest wooden house -house number 8- in Germany.

Before my arrival in Brussels, I served as spokesperson for forestry and agriculture in the Bavarian state parliament. In the European parliament, I have continued to be engaged in these areas, most recently as the shadow rapporteur for the new EU forest strategy.

The central purpose of the Club du Bois in 2015 will be to guide the cooperation and progress of industry, policymakers and stakeholders according to the new manifesto of the woodworking and furniture industry and ensure progress.

The manifesto serves as the work plan for the Club du Bois and outlines three objectives: to increase competitiveness to benefit EU growth and jobs, to support EU environmental and climate change targets and to promote agriculture and rural development.

To do this, the club will work to raise awareness on the qualities of wood and appeal to legislators, both national and European, to regulate in a way that allows the sector to realise its full potential.

There is great potential for growth in the woodworking and furniture industry on the basis of sustainable wood use. Only sustainably-managed forests can support a sustainable timber industry.

The Club du Bois will serve as a catalyst for discussions leading to resource-efficient wood manufacturing and the fostering of new innovative products in the wood industry.

As we look to implement the new EU forest strategy the club allows for exchange with experts from the European commission and member state representatives about current and upcoming issues of European forests and the European woodworking industry.

Already, the industry has set high standards for itself, aiming to increase its total annual output by four per cent. This jump would mean €2.35bn to the European economy and create 80,000 new jobs while saving 150 million tonnes of CO₂.

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The Club du Bois will work with the EU institutions to establish a level playing field and eliminate regulatory incoherence while supporting greater access to funding and stimulating investment.

Enhancing the use of wood products and substituting wood for energy-intensive construction materials can bring us closer to achieving our ambitious environmental targets.

Sustainability is a key growth strategy for the forest sector. Wood stores carbon and the longer harvested wood is used, the longer this carbon is captured. In this way, prolonging the wood lifecycle by using, reusing and recycling wood and wood products reduces atmospheric levels of greenhouse gases.

For example, a ten per cent increase in the number of wooden houses built in Europe could produce CO2 savings accounting for 25 per cent of the reductions prescribed in the Kyoto Protocol.

Unfortunately fragmented and restrictive building codes that differ throughout the EU discourage the use of wood and limit the economic and environmental benefits otherwise

We must establish the right policy frameworks and socioeconomic conditions that make wood use attractive by reorganising incentives to improve the total supply of wood as a raw material.

Not only will this encourage afforestation and reforestation across Europe, it will also enhance the harvesting of sustainably managed forests and drive the planting of new woodlands to meet rising demand for wood grown and sourced in the EU.

In addition, the European woodworking industry is a central player in remote areas, supporting stable employment and investment to counteract delocalisation and enhance the competitiveness of rural areas.

I invite my fellow MEPs to join the Club du Bois to work towards these goals. Clearly, the future of the wood industry, and above all our ability to capitalise on its potential, depends on coherent, smart regulation.

We in the EU cannot afford to sacrifice our woods: neither our forests, nor our woodworking and furniture industry. By nature, a forest and a long wood lifecycle is an enduring commitment that can provide foundation for European economic and environmental goals in the decades to come.

About the author

Maria Noichl (S&D) is a new member of the European parliament representing the Bavarian regions of Oberbayern and Schwaben. She is a member of the agriculture and rural development committee as well as the committee on women's rights and gender equality and is the S&D group's shadow rapporteur for the new EU forest strategy

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[Energy](#) [2]

[Environment](#) [3]

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[Employment](#) [5]

[Environment](#) [6]



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