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Press Release

Copa & Cogeca, CEPF, FACE, ELO welcome new EU Court of Auditors report showing huge potential of Natura 2000 in protecting biodiversity but warn uptake is poor as funds difficult to access

Copa & Cogeca, CEPF, FACE, ELO welcomed in Brussels today a new EU Court of Auditors report which shows the huge potential of Natura 2000 in protecting biodiversity but warn that uptake is poor as the network is not being managed properly and funds are difficult to access.

The report states that the Natura 2000 network is a key element of the EU's strategy to halt biodiversity loss and it plays a major role in protecting biodiversity. But it found that significant progress is still needed if the EU's goals are to be met.

Secretary-General Pekka Pesonen of the European Farmers and Agri-Cooperatives Organisation (Copa & Cogeca) warned "In particular, it indicates that EU funds are insufficient and difficult to access, and there is too much red tape and bureaucracy surrounding the measures. Although money is available under the LIFE project, for example, farmers themselves theoretically eligible for it rarely access it in practice. Managing the Natura 2000 network benefits the whole of society and the economic benefits are estimated at 200-300 billion euros from more tourism, better resource efficiency and other effects. These benefits are due to the good work of farmers, landowners and forest owners who are the key protectors of biodiversity. Yet the financial losses they make as a result of the measures are often much higher than the compensation received, the report shows".

Secretary-General Thierry de l'Escaille of the European Landowners Organisation (ELO) went on to underline that land covered by Natura 2000 already loses a lot of its value just by being designated as a Natura 2000 area. "There are many costs involved in this which are just not covered by the EU and Member States. Farmers, landowners and forest owners have a huge potential to make it work, but they must have the right support to do it. Actual spending and future funding also needs to be estimated more accurately at site level, it recommends", he insisted.

Secretary-General of the Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) Emma Berglund said, "The report indicates that measures would be more successful in the longer term if there was a more permanent source of funding rather than being limited to for example 4 years in some cases. Farmers, land owners and forest owners are responsible for producing high nature value forests and farmland and they should be rewarded for this to ensure that they continue their important activities. Decision-makers must recognise this in the future and find ways for workable and simpler approaches to ensure better implementation of the measures".

Wrapping up, Ludwig Willnegger, Secretary-General of the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE) said "Within the Natura 2000 network, we know many examples where farmers, forest owners and other rural stakeholders such as hunters have been poorly treated. The Network has frequently been forced onto local communities, which does not promote community-based conservation. It's clear that Member States need to invest more in

communicating with and incentivizing the land users, which contributed to the quality of these sites in the first place”.

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