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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

## Thirty-seventh Session

Colombo, Sri Lanka

31 January-2 February 2024 and 19-22 February 2024

## Report of the Thirtieth Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC)

### Executive Summary

The Thirtieth Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC-30) was held from 3 to 6 October 2023 in Sydney, Australia. Delegates from 25 Member Nations, 1 Observer, and 1 United Nations organization participated in the Session, along with representatives from 14 regional and international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The session attracted approximately 150 participants and included several side events organized by FAO, Member Nations and partner organizations during a pre-session “Dialogue Day” and throughout the week. This information note summarizes the discussion items and suggested action to be taken by FAO.

### Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Conference is invited to take note of the recommendations of the APFC-30<sup>1</sup> and advise FAO on the key steps to be taken in the countries of the region. Key outcomes consisted of inviting FAO to take the following actions:

- a. Support Member Nations, upon request and subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, with technical expertise to enhance the legality, sustainability, productivity and value-added of wood and non-wood forest product (NWFP) value chains, including in domestic and international markets, thereby contributing to the transformation of sustainable agrifood systems and ensuring the balanced commercialization and traditional use of NWFPs.
- b. Explore the potential for the “Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World” initiative to upscale its market development initiatives and other activities in the Asia-Pacific region.
- c. Assist Member Nations, upon request and subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, to improve and facilitate access by rural producers and small- and medium-sized enterprises to knowledge, innovation and finance, and to create conducive conditions for access to markets and inclusion in value chains.
- d. Continue efforts to develop an enabling environment to achieve sustainable forest management, including by: (a) encouraging regional policy dialogues; (b) facilitating

<sup>1</sup> APFC/2023/REP

Documents can be consulted at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

technical exchanges and providing technical expertise; (c) promoting capacity building to encourage upscaling of sustainable wood and NWFP use; and (d) supporting national initiatives to achieve net-zero emission activities.

- e. Continue to work on modelling of global fibre demand and supply to support global and domestic policy development.
- f. Continue to support its Member Nations in upscaling forest and landscape restoration (FLR) in the region in line with the Regional Strategy and Action Plan for FLR in Asia-Pacific and other relevant global commitments, and report on progress made at its next session.
- g. Promote an informal network of FLR practitioners for technical knowledge exchange and to build synergies, and continue, subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, to develop tools and approaches, and enhance capacities for upscaling FLR.
- h. Support its Member Nations, upon request and subject to the availability of resources, in the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework, by providing technical assistance to build capacity, developing relevant tools and knowledge products, supporting monitoring of progress, and supporting the development of collaborative investment strategies.
- i. Consider the use of sustainable forest management frameworks, such as the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators, and Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests<sup>2</sup> in developing the Global Programme on Biodiversity Mainstreaming in Forestry.
- j. Consider traditional practices and knowledge in its work on sustainable use and conservation of forests.
- k. Continue to support its Member Nations in improving national assessment and reporting on primary forests, including in terms of increased consistency across countries.
- l. Continue the implementation of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) 8-funded Indo-Malaya Critical Forest Biome Integrated Program (GEF8 IM CFB IP), including by: promoting cross-sectoral linkages and policy coherence in support of mainstreaming primary forest considerations into relevant agricultural sector policies and practices; and facilitating sharing of experience and lessons learned with other countries with similar conditions and other relevant initiatives.
- m. Continue capacity building, knowledge exchange and resource mobilization in disaster risk management and address relevant factors that affect the health and vitality of forests, including through the Global Fire Management Hub and related initiatives.
- n. Incorporate the Landscape Fire Governance Framework<sup>3</sup> into its work on integrated fire management.
- o. Continue to promote the One Health approach through collaborative efforts to improve the health and resilience of forests and rangelands, including through the Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network.
- p. Continue work on the contributions of large- and small-scale farming to deforestation in order to better understand the key drivers and identify alternative livelihood options that are less harmful to forests.
- q. Share examples of good practice from the GEF8 IM CFB IP to strengthen the broader region's capacity in sustainable forest management.
- r. Continue to support its Member Nations in implementing the recommendations and report on progress made at its next session.

<sup>2</sup> ITTO 2016. *Criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of tropical forests*. ITTO Policy Development Series No. 21. International Tropical Timber Organization, Yokohama, Japan.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wildfire2023.pt/conference/framework>

- s. Follow up on options identified for the APFC Governance Review, as appropriate, and report on progress made at a next session as well as at the Twenty-seventh Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO 27).
- t. Ensure that its Member Nations are consulted on FAO forestry strategic planning and given an opportunity to comment on the draft FAO Forestry Roadmap before COFO 27.
- u. Ensure that future sessions of COFO provide space for regional forestry commissions to provide updates on their progress and achievements.
- v. Ensure that recommendations are presented to the secretariats of COFO and the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference as well as to other regional forestry commissions.

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## I. Introduction

1. Created in 1949, the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) is one of the six regional forestry commissions established by FAO. It is an Article VI statutory body and its main functions are to: discuss and assess technical and policy issues and trends relevant to forestry in the region; develop and advance mechanisms for regional and subregional cooperation in addressing forestry problems; and advise FAO on policy formulation and priorities for its forestry programmes in the region. The Commission currently counts 34 Member Nations as members.<sup>4</sup>
2. This information note summarizes the progress along main topics related to the 22 recommendations of APFC-30.

## II. Background

3. APFC-30 was held in Sydney, Australia, from 3 to 6 October 2023. Delegates from 25 Member Nations and 1 United Nations organization participated in the session, together with observer and representatives from 14 regional and international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. In conjunction with the Commission Session, an “APFC Dialogue Day” was held on 2 October, comprising eight workshop-style side events organized by government agencies of several Member Nations (Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea and Malaysia), various partner organizations and FAO, and an evening information marketplace. Five additional side events were held in the margins of the APFC session.
4. The main theme of APFC-30 was “Sustainable forests for a sustainable future”. The Commission recognized that sustainable production and consumption of wood and non-wood forest products can significantly contribute to achieving resilient, carbon-neutral and biodiversity-friendly economies in Asia and the Pacific.
5. APFC-30 elected Mr Keiran Andrusko (Australia) as the Chairperson of the APFC until the Thirty-first APFC Session; Mr Phub Dhendup (Bhutan), Mr Naoki Hayasaka (Japan), Mr Marcial Amaro Jr. (Philippines) as Vice-Chairpersons; and Mr Preecha Ongprasert (Thailand) as Rapporteur. Thailand informed the Commission of its interest to host the 31st Session.

## III. Progress to date

6. The presentation of progress to date is summarized around the main topics related to the recommendations of APFC-30: forest and landscape restoration (FLR); biodiversity; building resilience to climate change with particular focus on forest fires and pests and diseases; and progress in the APFC governance review.
7. **Forest and landscape restoration:** Forest and landscape restoration (FLR) is a critical element in moving towards biodiversity-positive development and for more meaningful and integrated agrifood systems transformation in Asia and the Pacific. Specifically, in Asia, the sum of all national restoration pledges is estimated to total about 185 million hectares. FAO has been assigned co-leadership (with the United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP]) of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030. Considering the relevance of FLR, a Regional Strategy and Action Plan on FLR in Asia-Pacific was endorsed at APFC-27. A broad variety of activities have been implemented, among which highlights include: (i) supporting the development of national FLR plans in Nepal, Pakistan and Vanuatu; (ii) shaping a regional FLR programmatic framework and network; (iii) holding ten FLR Days in Bangkok and organizing a Regional Dialogue on FLR and Sustainable Wood Supply; (iv) developing the Economics of Ecosystem Restoration initiative to highlight the costs and benefits of FLR; and (v) organizing national FLR investment roundtables (in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Timor-Leste). FAO supported countries to access resources from GEF8 (Nepal, Viet Nam), and Green Climate Fund (Fiji, Nepal) and provided direct support through a Regional Technical Cooperation Project to six countries (Bangladesh, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Nepal, Pakistan,

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<sup>4</sup> Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russian Federation, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, and the United Kingdom (observer status)

Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste). Additionally, many countries in the region have specified restoration goals, including in their national forest and agroforestry-related policies and plans, land degradation neutrality targets, nationally determined contributions, and national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

8. **Forests and biodiversity:** For over four decades, FAO has been tracking the status and trends of primary forests. Measuring primary forest areas consistently across diverse biomes and data sources has presented challenges; consequently, FAO initiated a special study in 2019 aimed at refining guidelines and methodologies for reporting on primary forest areas. Ongoing work includes finalizing biome-specific guidance documents and developing geospatial tools to assist countries in accurately reporting primary forest extent and changes. FAO is also developing a comprehensive Global Programme on Biodiversity Mainstreaming in Forestry to enhance the role of sustainably managed forests in biodiversity conservation, management, and sustainable use. Following recommendations from the Third Asia-Pacific Forest Sector Outlook Study (2019), FAO and the Centre for International Forestry Research produced the Asia-Pacific Roadmap for Primary Forest Conservation to inform decision-makers and other actors on assessing the state of primary forests in the region and identifying priority areas and priority actions for primary forest conservation. FAO is implementing several GEF-funded forest biodiversity related projects, including in Nepal, Solomon Islands, Thailand and Papua New Guinea. Recently, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and FAO have commenced co-leadership of the GEF8 Indo-Malaya Critical Forest Biomes Integrated Program with country projects in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Papua New Guinea and Thailand, together with a regional coordination and technical support project, which aims at maintaining the integrity of globally important primary forests in Indo-Malaya.

9. **Building resilience to climate change – a focus on forest fires and pests and diseases:** The FAO Fire Management Strategy 2019 sets out an integrated fire management approach and underpins FAO’s support to and interaction with Member Nations. FAO’s recent significant activities relating to integrated fire management include: FAO and the Korea Forest Service convening a Fire Management Forum – “Wildfires Beyond Forests” at the XV World Forestry Congress in Korea in 2022; FAO and the Korea Forest Service also launching the “Assuring the Future of Forests through Integrated Risk Management” mechanism to be piloted in the Mekong subregion; and FAO and UNEP co-developing a Global Fire Management Hub. In individual Asia-Pacific countries, FAO has: supported Timor Leste in reviewing fire management; assisted Myanmar to prepare a national fire management strategy; supported Indonesia in a review of Fire Danger Rating Systems and peatland fire emissions factors; and provided technical guidance to Pakistan for damaging wildfires experienced in Balochistan in May 2022. In relation to forest pests and diseases, the Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network continues to be active in the region with key activities including capacity building and a study on climate change and spread of pests. In March 2023, the network held a webinar on invasive forest insect pests, pathogens and weeds. It is also undertaking a “Regional assessment on the status of forest invasive species in the Asia-Pacific region”. Under the One Health initiative, “Guidelines for development and implementation of national forest biosecurity strategies, systems and processes” is being prepared.

10. **Review of APFC governance modalities and coordination with COFO:** In 2019, at its Twenty-eighth Session, APFC requested that FAO develop a scoping document outlining potential elements and processes for a review of its governance, including budgetary implications.<sup>5</sup> During its 25th Session, held on 5-9 October 2020, the Committee on Forestry (COFO) requested FAO to consult with the regional forestry commissions on ways to help facilitate their policy dialogues and technical exchanges to assist them in achieving their Member Nations’ goals and contributions to international processes and goals.<sup>6</sup> COFO invited FAO to explore options for further linking the work of forestry-related Statutory Bodies to the work of the FAO Forestry Division and policy areas with relevance for forestry, in order to increase their relevance and efficiency and to create synergies and enhance

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<sup>5</sup> APFC/2019/REP

<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 35, C 2021/24

participation.<sup>7</sup> As regards the review of the APFC governance structure, it was decided to undertake the review in three phases, aligned with the calendars of COFO and future APFC sessions.

- i. **First phase:** The review was initiated in November 2021 and encompassed a review and analysis of APFC modalities, including institutional structures and linkages, proceedings and outcomes of recent sessions, and key recent outputs produced by the Commission. The first phase also involved consultation with Member Nations and key partners and culminated in the development of the scoping document for discussion.
- ii. **Second phase:** In July 2022, an informal consultation was conducted to share the findings of the scoping document with Member Nation and observer representatives and to facilitate provision of their inputs into the APFC governance reform process. A Co-Chairs' Report on the Informal Consultation summarized the discussions and detailed the various ideas and suggestions for potential reform of APFC's governance and processes.
- iii. **Third phase:** In March 2023, the Nineteenth Meeting of the APFC Executive Committee reviewed and endorsed a draft outline for reporting progress on the governance review at APFC-30. On the advice of the Executive Committee, the outline was also shared with Member Nations for their comments and inputs. Based on this advice, the Secretariat has distilled pragmatic suggested actions for consideration by the Commission

#### IV. Conclusions

11. The highly successful APFC-30 was organized and implemented with excellent collaboration between the APFC Secretariat and the Australian Government. The high level of in-person attendance demonstrated strong and continued support to the Commission and its work. Enthusiasm by Member Nations and partners to conduct side events as part of APFC Dialogue Day, and the high level of participation (exceeding in-person capacity in some instances) demonstrated the value of this new concept.

12. Preparations for APFC-31 are under way, with commitments of Member Nations made at APFC-30 to continue to work together with key stakeholders and FAO to improve forest management in the region and to pursue sustainable forest management for a sustainable future.

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<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 40, C 2021/24