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Potential leakage of biodiversity risks under the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030

S5.1 Forest Futures

Franziska Schier¹

Richard Fischer¹, Eliza Zhunusova¹, Sven Günter¹, Susanne Iost¹, Jörg Schweinle¹, Holger Weimar¹, Matthias Dieter¹

¹ Thünen Institute of Forestry, Thünen Institute, Germany

Abstract: The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 (EUBDS) aims to regain biodiversity through enhanced forest conservation and protection in the EU. Existing studies already suggest that this may lead to increased timber harvest in non-EU countries. The effects of such increased harvest and roundwood production on forest biodiversity elsewhere have not yet been evaluated. We aim to identify potential leakage of biodiversity risks as induced by the implementation of EUBDS. We set up a biodiversity indicator framework and quantify vulnerability with country-wise values for 26 biodiversity indicators, mainly from publicly available databases. For risk assessment, we weight single indicator values with country-wise modelled figures on changed timber production under EUBDS implementation. Nearly 80% of the indicators point to higher vulnerability in the affected non-EU countries. Roundwood production would be transferred to countries with, on average, lower governance quality, political awareness, forest coverage and biomass and with less sustainable forest management. These countries still have more natural habitat and intact forest landscapes, but higher risks of species extinction and lower shares of protected areas. Only a few indicators point to lower vulnerability and biodiversity risks outside the EU. We conclude that safeguards are needed to ensure that implementation of EUBDS does not cause harm to ecosystems elsewhere. In this regard, the EU regulation on deforestation free supply chains might have limited effects because it hardly considers the sustainable management of persisting and even expanding forests. But as long as forest management is less sustainable and as long as forest protection status is lower outside EU, sustained roundwood production in the EU is needed to avoid placing more pressure on more vulnerable ecosystems elsewhere. Decreasing species and habitat indicator values nevertheless call for conservation and protection schemes. Effective land use planning is needed to balance conservation schemes with roundwood production.