

Roundtable on the Role of Forests in Tackling Climate Change

25 October 2024 – Roundtable in Jerez

Event Overview

A roundtable discussion on "Forests and Climate Change" took place in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, on 25 October as part of the International Climate Change Congress. The event, organised by the Climate Change Agency of the Andalusian Government (Oficina de Cambio Climático, Junta de Andalucía), brought together key stakeholders and experts to explore the critical role of forests in the fight against climate change and to discuss the role of the European Union's ambitious pledge to plant 3 billion additional trees by 2030.

The roundtable facilitated an engaging dialogue on issues related to reforestation and tree planting initiatives, forest management, biodiversity conservation and climate action, and provided a platform for the panel of experts to share insights, challenges and innovative approaches to tree planting and forest restoration in Spain and the wider European context. The discussion was particularly timely following the UN Biodiversity Conference in Colombia the same week, where representatives met to discuss the implementation of the global Biodiversity Convention framework.

Detailed Event Overview

Opening Keynote Address

Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director of Natural Capital, DG ENV

The roundtable started with a video addressed by Mr Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director of Natural Capital of the Directorate General of the Environment (DG ENV) of the European Commission. Mr Delgado Rosa provided a compelling overview of the essential role that forests play in addressing climate change and its effects. He emphasised that forests not only capture carbon, but also help in adapting to climate change by regulating temperature, slowing desertification, and maintaining favourable microclimates. Mr Delgado Rosa highlighted the multifaceted benefits of forests beyond

climate mitigation, including biodiversity conservation, water filtration, air purification, and soil stabilisation. He touched upon the cultural and economic significance of forests, underlining their importance as part of our common natural heritage.

The keynote drew attention to the increasing pressures on Europe's forests, from severe droughts and fires to pests, diseases and invasive species, all exacerbated by the accelerating effects of climate change. Mr Delgado Rosa stressed the need to protect and adapt forests to these challenges by increasing their resilience. Mr Delgado Rosa then introduced the [European Commission's pledge](#) to plant 3 billion additional trees by 2030, a key initiative to increase forest cover across Europe with these very goals in mind. In explaining the focus of the pledge, he emphasised the importance of planting the right tree in the right place for the right purpose, highlighting the need for additional tree planting that goes beyond business-as-usual reforestation efforts. He also referred to the European Green Pact and its ambitious target to sequester 310 million tonnes of CO₂ per year by 2030 through land use and forestry.

Introduction

Matthew Geraci, Policy Advisor, Milieu Consulting SRL

The roundtable began with a warm welcome from the roundtable moderator, Matthew Geraci of Milieu Consulting SRL, who set the tone for the ensuing discussion by highlighting recent scientific studies showing that the ability of European forests to act as carbon sinks has been declining rapidly in recent years – a change that most countries, and many EU Member States, had not taken into account in their international climate change commitments. Matthew Geraci concluded by giving an overview of the roundtable agenda, which consisted of a keynote speech and presentation by Adrian Tistan from DG ENV, followed by a series of shorter, more focused presentations by the four other roundtable panellists, and concluding with a moderated Q&A session. This format allowed for a wide-ranging exploration of different aspects of forest management and tree planting initiatives, focusing both on successful strategies on the ground in Andalusia and on best practices that could be applied at EU level.

Keynote Speaker

Adrian Tistan, Policy Officer, DG ENV

After the moderator's opening remarks, he introduced Adrian Tistan from DG ENV, who provided an in-depth look at the European Commission's EU Forest Strategy 2030 and its implementation through several measures including the 3 Billion additional Trees by 2030 Pledge. Mr Tistan explained the set of guidelines for biodiversity-friendly afforestation and reforestation, emphasising the core principle of planting the right tree in the right place for the right purpose.

Mr Tistan highlighted the potential for afforestation in Europe, noting that up to 60 million hectares of land could be suitable for tree planting. He stressed the importance of focusing on degraded and abandoned areas while avoiding productive agricultural land. The presentation also touched on the role of agroforestry in meeting the 3 Billion Trees Pledge. A key point raised by Mr Tistan was the need for additionality in tree planting efforts. He explained that the 3 Billion Trees Pledge aims to double the current rate of forest expansion beyond business as usual scenarios. The importance of proper care and monitoring of planted trees was also emphasised, with Mr Tistan noting the high mortality rates of trees planted in urban areas within their first decade.

Finally, Mr Tistan concluded his remarks with a hopeful call for action, encouraging the audience to register trees that they or their organisations may have planted with the official tree counting website for the Pledge, in order to bring us closer to the EU's ambitious goal of 3 billion additional trees planted by 2030, as there are many trees that may have met the necessary criteria of planted trees for the Pledge, but are not reflected in the official count because they have not yet been registered.

Roundtable presentations

Challenges and Opportunities in Planting Trees for 3 Billion Tree Pledge

Marta Ballesteros, Senior Manager, Milieu Consulting SRL

Marta Ballesteros of Milieu Consulting provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing the 3 Billion Trees Pledge. Her presentation highlighted several key issues faced by stakeholders involved in tree planting initiatives.

One of the primary challenges identified was the availability of sustainable funding. Ms Ballesteros noted that organisations often struggle to secure long-term funding that allows for future planning. She also highlighted the difficulty of obtaining funding for crucial aspects such as land preparation, staff and ongoing tree management. The lack of awareness of available funding sources is a factor influencing this challenge. Ms Ballesteros revealed that only 5% of available funding under the Common Agricultural Policy had been used for agroforestry schemes, indicating a need for better dissemination of information. Legal challenges were also discussed, including issues related to carbon credits and licensing procedures. Ms Ballesteros suggested that changes in legislation could allow tree planting organisations to benefit from carbon credits, potentially providing a new source of funding for their efforts. Additional legal challenges involved permitting procedures for forestry which included limitations for non-agriculture activities in agriculture land and requirements for land conversion to forest land in order to carry out tree planting initiatives, excluding the possibility of mix practices such as planting trees in agriculture land borders. More flexibility in the legal requirements and procedures would facilitate the increase of forest cover in the EU.

Despite these challenges, Ms Ballesteros emphasised the opportunities presented by the 3 Billion Trees Pledge to be part of the solution to the global challenge of climate change. She encouraged all stakeholders to get involved in tree planting, highlighting the potential benefits in terms of visibility, access to funding and contribution to climate change mitigation.

Reforestation Initiatives: A Case Study from Andalusia

Jordi Juanós, Director, Fundación Plant-for-the-Planet España

Jordi Juanós of the Plant for the Planet Foundation in Spain presented a compelling case study of successful reforestation efforts in Andalusia. The Reforestando Andalucía initiative demonstrated an innovative approach to stakeholder involvement and public-private partnerships in tree planting projects. Mr Juanós described how his organisation acts as a facilitator, bringing together private donors, public administrations and civil society to achieve reforestation goals. He emphasised the importance of what he called 'public-private-participative partnerships' in overcoming challenges and maximising impact.

The presentation highlighted two major projects being administered by his organisation: the restoration of the burned area in the Doñana Natural Park and the Green Belt of Granada. Mr Juanós provided

some impressive figures, noting that by the end of the current planting season they expect to have planted over 680,000 trees in Andalusia, with a total investment of around €4 million. A key aspect of the approach of his organisation is a commitment to working with local Andalusian businesses, giving priority to those that employ people at risk of social exclusion. This strategy not only contributes to reforestation efforts, but also supports local socio-economic development. He also mentioned the difficulties for planting trees organisations to access carbon credits and referred to the agreement with the Andalusian Government which provides access to the carbon credits in order to reinvest the resources in tree planting and forest management.

Mr Juanós concluded by highlighting a shift in their communication strategy, from talking about 'trees planted' to 'forests alive'. This change reflects a focus on the long-term impact and survival of planted trees, recognising the challenges of mortality and the need for ongoing care and management.

The Olympic Forest Initiative: Sports and Sustainability

Manuel Parga Landa, Director of Marketing and Sustainability, Comité Olímpico Español

Manuel Parga Landa, Director of Marketing and Sustainability at the Spanish Olympic Committee, presented an innovative approach to combining sport and forest conservation through the Olympic Forest Initiative. This unique project demonstrates how sports organisations can make a meaningful contribution to climate change action and biodiversity conservation.

Mr Parga Landa explained that the Spanish Olympic Committee, recognising the impact of climate change on sport and the carbon footprint generated by sporting events, has made the fight against climate change a key part of its mission. The Olympic Forest Initiative is a response to this commitment and aims to compensate the remaining carbon footprint of sports organisations and events. The initiative works by creating partnerships with local authorities and private sponsors to plant trees and develop forests across Spain. These forests not only serve as carbon sinks but also include educational and sports-related components, enhancing their impact beyond mere tree planting.

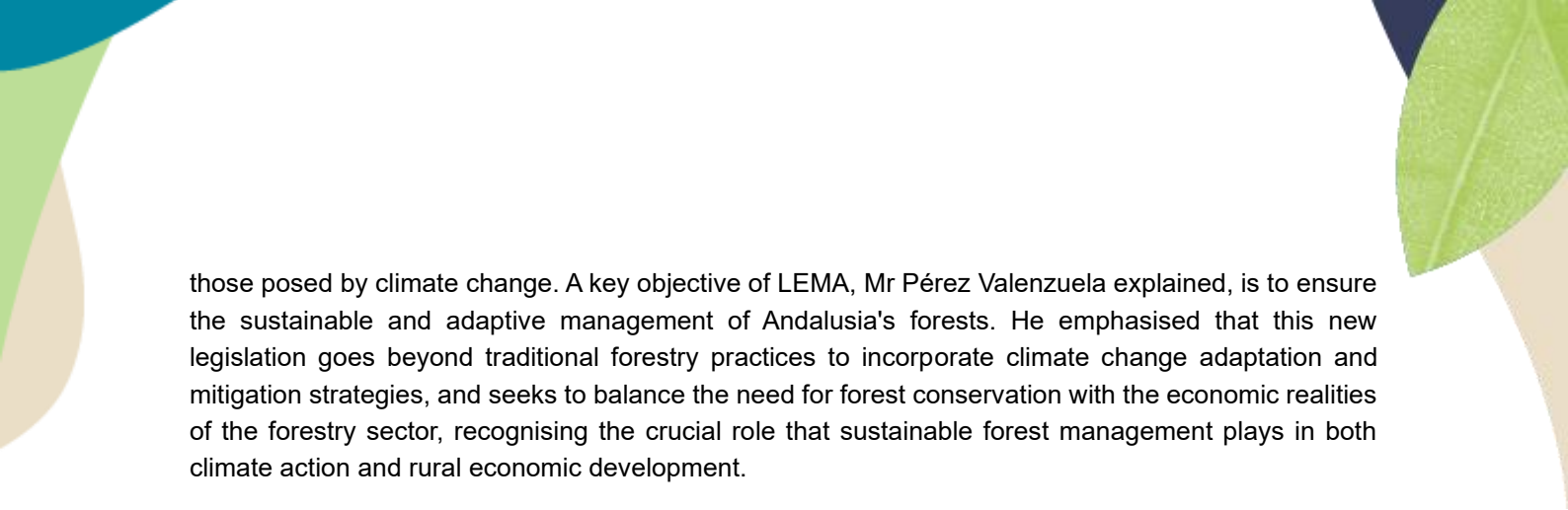
Mr Parga Landa highlighted that the Olympic Forest Initiative has already established five forests, planting more than 5,000 trees over an area of more than eight hectares. While the carbon sequestration of these forests is currently modest, the initiative serves as an important message and model for other sports organisations, demonstrating the potential for cross-sector collaboration in addressing climate change.

Andalusian Forestry Policy and Climate Change Adaptation

Juan Ramón Pérez Valenzuela, Director General of Forestry Policy and Biodiversity, Junta de Andalucía

Juan Ramón Pérez Valenzuela, Director General for Forestry Policy and Biodiversity, Junta de Andalucía, provided insights into forestry policy and climate change adaptation strategies from a more regional and local perspective. His presentation highlighted the unique challenges faced by Andalusia, a region at the forefront of climate change impacts in Europe.

Mr Pérez Valenzuela introduced the audience to a new legislative proposal: the Andalusian Forest Law, known as LEMA. This bill, which was in the final stages of public consultation at the time of the roundtable, aims to adapt the region's forestry legislation to the challenges of the future, particularly



those posed by climate change. A key objective of LEMA, Mr Pérez Valenzuela explained, is to ensure the sustainable and adaptive management of Andalusia's forests. He emphasised that this new legislation goes beyond traditional forestry practices to incorporate climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, and seeks to balance the need for forest conservation with the economic realities of the forestry sector, recognising the crucial role that sustainable forest management plays in both climate action and rural economic development.

He also touched on how the LEMA aligns with and supports the implementation of EU level initiatives such as the 3 Billion Trees Pledge. The new law, he explained, creates a framework that will facilitate Andalusia's contribution to this ambitious goal, while ensuring that tree planting and forest expansion efforts are carried out in a manner that is both environmentally sound and economically viable. It provides a clearer framework facilitating tree planting organisations access to carbon credits as a new source of funding.

Mr Pérez Valenzuela concluded by expressing the hope that LEMA would serve as a model for other regions facing similar challenges, demonstrating how forestry policy can be modernised to meet the complex demands of the 21st century.

Roundtable Discussion

Moderated Q&A

The roundtable concluded with a moderated question and answer discussion that brought together the various themes and perspectives presented throughout the event. Key points of discussion included:

- The need for a holistic approach to forest management that balances carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation and socio-economic benefits.
- The critical role of legislation to facilitate the increase of forest cover in the EU by providing a more flexible framework to forestry.
- The importance of sustainable funding mechanisms, including the potential role of carbon credits in financing forest restoration and management.
- The value of public-private partnerships in overcoming challenges and maximising the impact of tree planting initiatives.
- The potential for cross-sector collaboration, as exemplified by the Olympic Forest Initiative, to advance forest conservation and climate change goals.
- The importance of focusing not only on planting trees, but also on ensuring their long-term survival and the overall health of forest ecosystems.

Concluding points

The roundtable on forests and climate change in Jerez de la Frontera explored many important challenges and opportunities associated with European forest management and tree planting in the context of climate change. It highlighted the critical role of forests in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, but also the need for nuanced, context-specific approaches to forest management, afforestation and reforestation. The event underlined the importance of cooperation between EU institutions, national and regional governments, NGOs and the private sector to achieve the ambitious goals set out in the EU Forest Strategy 2030 and, in particular, to ensure that the 3 Billion Trees Pledge success in its ambition reflecting the joint effort of all tree planting initiatives with ecological objectives carried out in the EU. As a result, the discussions made clear the need for continued efforts

and knowledge sharing in order to address the complex challenges posed by climate change on European forests.

The discussions concluded with a clear consensus on the urgent need for action and the potential for forests to play a key role in addressing the climate crisis – including through the successful realisation of the 3 Billion Trees Pledge. The insights shared during this roundtable will undoubtedly contribute to shaping future actions related to forest management and climate action not only in Spain, but across the EU. Moving forward, it will be crucial to maintain the momentum generated by this event and to translate the ideas and strategies discussed into concrete action on the ground. This will require ongoing dialogue, cooperation and commitment from all stakeholders involved in forest management and climate action.