



Workshop on the implementation of the EU pledge for 3 Billion additional Trees in Spain

Summary of the rest of the seminar - Madrid, 23 April 2026

Event Overview

The workshop, organised by the European Commission and the Spanish Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, with the support of Milieu Consulting, examined the implementation in Spain of the EU's commitment to plant 3,000 million additional trees between 2020 and 2030. The European initiative is guided by the principle of planting the right tree, in the right place and for the right purpose, and features a virtual European register or counter of organisations and trees planted, called Mapmytree. During the various question-and-answer sessions at the workshop, key issues were raised, such as the relevance of its objectives in relation to biodiversity and climate change, and its connection to the Nature Restoration Regulation.

The debate brought together European institutions, national authorities, public and private bodies, civil society organisations and stakeholders from the forestry sector. The presentations and discussions focused on the conditions necessary to expand tree cover in Spain, recording actions in the European register whilst avoiding double counting, guaranteeing the ecological quality of plantations, mobilising funding, and ensuring the long-term maintenance and monitoring of the trees planted.

The interventions showed that Spain has extensive technical experience in afforestation, hydrological-forest restoration, plant production and forest management, but also that the implementation of the 3 Billion Trees Pledge requires structural barriers to be addressed. These include fragmented ownership, the effective land availability, shortages of labour and generational renewal, nursery capacity, stable finance, climate uncertainty, long-term monitoring of plantings and the integration of wildfire risk into forest and restoration planning.

Opening and welcome address by the organisers

Marta Ballesteros (Milieu Consulting), moderator of the event

Marta Ballesteros opened the workshop by welcoming the participants and outlining the environmental objectives of the initiative to plant 3,000 million trees across the EU: to contribute to biodiversity and the fight against climate change through the planting of additional trees. The initiative aims to complement the economic use of forests, contributing to the conservation of existing forests, their restoration and the improvement of forest resilience. She emphasised that the figure of 3,000 million trees also serves as a communication tool to raise the profile of a common European objective.

She also explained Milieu Consulting's role in the project supporting the Commission in implementing the EU Forest Strategy, including analysing the challenges involved in tree planting, drawing up a guide on funding opportunities and organising national workshops. He outlined the structure of the event, with an opening session dedicated to the European Initiative and the tree registration process, followed by sessions on Spanish initiatives to increase forest cover, regional experiences and contributions from stakeholders working on the ground.

Marta introduced the representatives of the organisations responsible for the event, who then gave a few words of welcome and an introduction, namely: M. Jesús Rodríguez Sánchez from the Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, and Nicolaos Isaris from the European Commission Representation in Spain.

María Jesús Rodríguez Sánchez (MITECO, Directorate-General for Biodiversity, Forests and Desertification)

María Jesús Rodríguez Sánchez opened the workshop on behalf of the Ministry and emphasised that tree planting should be understood as a comprehensive process encompassing planning, seed collection, seedling production, site preparation, planting, maintenance and subsequent management. She stressed that the objective should not be reduced to a symbolic gesture, but should result in lasting effects on tree cover and ecosystem services.

In the Mediterranean context, she highlighted the multifunctionality of forests, including functions such as timber and non-timber forest production, nature restoration, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, erosion control, water regulation, protection against extreme weather events, and the improvement of well-being in towns and cities. For Spain, he highlighted the objective of increasing the forested area by 600,000 hectares, to exceed 20 million hectares – around 40 per cent of the national territory – through reforestation, the consolidation of natural regeneration and the restoration of forest habitats.

She also emphasised the need for active forest management and adequate funding. In the context of the negotiations on the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework, she outlined Spain's position in favour of sufficient funding via recognisable and stable percentage allocation for reforestation, with a view to promoting biodiversity and sustainable forest management, as well as the continuation of the LIFE programme, which has been particularly important for Spain in the areas of forestry and species conservation.

Nicolaos Isaris (European Commission Representation in Spain)

Nicolaos Isaris linked the initiative to the 40th anniversary of Spain's accession to the EU and to the values of cooperation and protection of our shared natural heritage. He pointed out that trees are essential allies in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss, as they filter water, purify the air, stabilise the soil, enhance the landscape and generate income for foresters and farmers.

He emphasised that the European commitment is voluntary, ambitious and quality-oriented. It is not simply a matter of counting trees, but of recording additional trees that provide ecological value – for example, plantations in areas where there was previously no forest, or measures that replace monocultures with more diverse, resilient stands that are beneficial for biodiversity and the climate. He also drew attention to the recent impact of forest fires in Spain and to the need to integrate tree planting into a broader response involving active restoration, resilience and risk management.

First Session: The 3,000 million trees initiative, the registration process and enabling factors

Elena Lobo (European Commission, DG ENV) – The EU's commitment to plant a further 3,000 million trees

Elena Lobo outlined the rationale behind the EU 3 Billion Tree initiative, noting that the target represents a potential increase of approximately 1.3 per cent to 1.9 per cent in the EU's current forest area through afforestation. She also highlighted the potential for planting on agricultural land and in urban areas, which far exceeds the target of the initiative, which she framed within the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 and the EU Forest Strategy to 2030.

The speaker emphasised that the tree-planting initiative delivers environmental, economic, social and climate benefits, but does not replace measures to protect existing forests. The basic principles of the commitment are additionality, respect for ecological criteria and long-term care. In practice, this involves selecting suitable sites, avoiding areas of high natural value where planting is not appropriate, excluding invasive alien species, respecting the principle of not causing significant harm, and ensuring that the trees survive and reach maturity.

He also explained that registering plantations increases the visibility of national, local and private initiatives as part of a joint European effort. The European tree counter (or register) is now open to organisations and individuals via Mapmytree. Although the figures recorded are still some way off the target, the register has the benefit of raising the profile of authorities, associations and businesses in their tree-planting activities and in relation to the European commitment. In a **recent [publication](#), the Commission has identified the challenges** associated with implementing the initiative, which include: the legal framework, land-use conflicts, consistency with conservation objectives, compliance with ecological conditions and the availability of funding. In this context, the [funding guide](#) produced as part of the project compiles European, national, regional and innovative funding opportunities.

Finally, she linked this commitment to the Nature Restoration Regulation. In particular, Article 13 stipulates that Member States, when developing plans for the restoration of terrestrial ecosystems, must endeavour to contribute to the 3 billion trees commitment whilst fully respecting ecological principles, and must reflect these contributions in their national restoration plans.

Nicolas Robert (European Environment Agency) – The EU platform and counter for recording planted trees

Nicolas Robert presented the Mapmytree system, developed by the European Commission and the European Environment Agency. He explained that the system features one interface for members of the public and another for organisations that register large numbers of trees. The platform allows users to consult the European tree count, view plantations on an interactive map, register trees via a computer or mobile phone, and suggest suitable areas for future plantations.

For organisations, registration is carried out via ReportNet, following a request for access. Each major planting project requires a declaration of honour in which the organisation undertakes to comply with the initiative's criteria and to maintain the trees over the long term. The system only records projects that have already been carried out, not future plans. Data can be uploaded using an Excel template or entered directly into the system, with a combination of mandatory and optional fields.

The speaker emphasised that there are many plantings carried out since 2020 that have not yet been registered and that the aim of the workshop was to facilitate this process. The **counter** therefore does not yet reflect the full extent of all plantings carried out in the Member States.

Rob Mooney (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Ireland) – Ireland's afforestation plan and experience

Rob Mooney outlined the evolution of Irish forestry policy, from a forest cover of around 1 per cent at the start of the 20th century to approximately 12 per cent today, with the aim of reaching 18 per cent by 2030. Ireland's vision is based on planting the right trees, in the right places, for the right reasons and with the right management, encompassing five areas of value: climate, nature, timber, people, the economy and rural development.

Among the main challenges, he highlighted the need to plant some 450,000 additional hectares to meet the national target, competition for land use, rising land values, the impacts of storms and other climate-related risks, the availability of labour, seeds and seedlings, as well as the need to provide secure income for landowners, particularly farmers. In response, Ireland is strengthening its programme of financial support for afforestation and sustainable forest management, agroforestry, small-scale plantations that contribute cumulatively, targeted communication with landowners, and more structured stakeholder engagement.

The speaker outlined three recent lines of action: the mid-term review of the forestry programme, a new communication and engagement strategy running until 2030, and the initiative to plant trees on public land. The latter offers 100 per cent subsidies, tax-free premiums for 15 years and support for recreational areas, with the aim of integrating afforestation into public bodies' climate plans and demonstrating institutional leadership. In conclusion, he emphasised that funding is necessary but not sufficient: land-use change requires time, trust and support for landowners.

Guillermo Fernández Centeno and Javier Inogés (MITECO, Directorate-General for Biodiversity, Forests and Desertification) – The Spanish Forestry Strategy and the National Restoration Plan

Guillermo Fernández Centeno and Javier Inogés presented Spain's afforestation and reforestation policy, highlighting that Spain has extensive technical and administrative experience in forest restoration, as well as a policy for maintaining planted areas. They noted that this accumulated knowledge is documented, amongst other sources, in a 2021 technical publication by the Ministry, comprising almost 1,500 pages and featuring case studies ranging from semi-arid areas to riparian forests and the regeneration of dehesas.

The Spanish Forestry Strategy, approved in 2022, sets the target of increasing the forested area by 20,000 hectares per year between 2020 and 2050. According to the information presented, since 2022 Spain has been planting around 15,000 hectares per year, with an upward trend, and the target is therefore considered achievable. The Spanish Forestry Plan also incorporates afforestation measures based on planning instruments and aligned with the European Green Deal, the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the EU Forestry Strategy 2030.

With regard to the Nature Restoration Regulation, the speakers explained that Spain is currently drawing up the draft National Restoration Plan, which is due to be submitted to the Commission in August 2026, with the final version – revised following the Commission's comments – expected in August 2027. The plan must set out the national context, the commitments and the areas where action will be taken, as well as the specific measures. Article 13 will require Spain to quantify its contribution to the commitment to plant 3,000 million trees.

To improve reporting, MITECO is working on a territorial information system, EIKOS, which will enable the collection of, amongst many other data points, information on reforestation efforts by autonomous communities and other administrations and, where applicable, the recording of this data in the European register, which requires coordination. Signing the declaration of honour entails the responsibility for maintaining and managing the planted trees for several decades, a responsibility that falls to the regional authorities. Among the challenges identified are coordination between authorities, land ownership structures, a shortage of workers in rural areas, the need for public and private landowners to implement forest management, and the inclusion of measures carried out by communal forests or member-owned forests.

Questions and discussion from session one

The discussion focused on the ambition of the commitment, the eligibility of natural regeneration, the monitoring of plantations and their ecological conditions, funding and coordination between registers. The Commission clarified that there are no national targets allocated per Member State and that the commitment to plant 3,000 million trees applies to the EU as a whole. It was also pointed out that natural regeneration may be counted in certain cases, provided it is the result of managed action aimed at achieving a desired forest, rather than simply being left to its own devices without monitoring.

Several contributions addressed the credibility and monitoring of [Mapmytree](#). It was explained that the initiative is voluntary and based on trust: the European institutions do not have the capacity to verify all plantations on the ground. However, the signatory organisations are responsible for ensuring compliance with the conditions; they must report incidents such as fires or felling that affect the commitment, and any member of the public can submit observations regarding existing plantations. Furthermore, the Commission has launched an annual award to raise the profile of registered plantations that meet certain requirements.

The feasibility of the European target and the gap between the current figure and the 3,000 million target were also discussed. The speakers acknowledged the ambitious nature of the target and pointed out that the figure does not reflect all the plantings carried out, as registration is not compulsory and many countries and organisations have not yet reported their data. From the Spanish perspective, it was explained that the contribution to Article 13 of the Nature Restoration Regulation can be estimated more accurately once the measures of the National Restoration Plan have been finalised and the collection of data from autonomous communities and other stakeholders has been completed.

With regard to funding and private sector participation, MITECO encouraged companies and public or private bodies that have carried out reforestation projects to register them directly on Mapmytree. Once the Ministry has incorporated the available information, it will cross-check the data to avoid double counting. It was confirmed that the target of 20,000 hectares per year includes both public and private contributions, as well as urban planting and established natural regeneration. The debate also addressed the importance of selecting species adapted to drought conditions and of considering climate resilience, particularly when maintenance requires irrigation over several summers.

Session two: Increasing the forest cover in Spain

José María Climent (National Institute for Agricultural and Food Research and Technology) – Genetic diversity and forest reproductive materials

José María Climent outlined the role of genetic diversity and forest reproductive materials in the success of plantations. He explained the importance of distinguishing between genetic differentiation amongst populations – which reflects accumulated local adaptation – and genetic diversity within each population, which is essential for future adaptation to climate change. The selection of provenances must take into account not only the current conditions at the planting site, but also future climate uncertainty.

The presentation highlighted the value of genetic and provenance trial networks, including the national GENFORD network, for assessing the local adaptation, phenotypic plasticity, resilience and adaptive traits such as growth, survival, fruit production and stress tolerance. As an example, it was noted that, in the case of the holm oak, choosing the best provenance can increase survival rates sixfold compared to the average.

Climent emphasised the importance of traceability and compliance with the Spanish Royal Decree on forest reproductive material, implementing the EU legislation. The use of certified material, sourced from catalogued basic material and meeting minimum seed collection requirements, helps to ensure genetic diversity and quality. Conversely, the use of commercial seeds without guarantees may compromise long-term adaptation and survival. Genetic improvement programmes can be useful, particularly in the face of biotic threats, but their implementation must be carefully assessed in light of the plantation's objective and the necessary diversity.

Adrián Gómez Serrano (Spanish Office for Climate Change, MITECO) – Carbon footprint registration, offsetting and CO₂ removal projects

Adrián Gómez Serrano presented the Spanish register on carbon footprint, offsetting and CO₂ sequestration projects that is managed by MITECO. The register, established in 2014 and updated by a new royal decree in 2025, is voluntary except for the General State Administration with regard to the calculation and recording of its carbon footprints and emission reduction plans. Its aim is to recognise the efforts of organisations, companies and public authorities to reduce emissions and promote national carbon sinks through agroforestry sequestration projects. The register consists of three interrelated sections: carbon footprint and reduction plans; carbon sequestration projects; and offsetting. The section on carbon sink projects currently includes reforestation resulting from land-use change in areas deforested since 1990 and reforestation following forest fires. Projects must meet minimum requirements regarding area, proportion of canopy cover and height at maturity; they must be maintained for between 30 and 50 years; they must use the Ministry's official calculator; they must submit a management plan; and they must submit monitoring reports every five years. According to the data presented, the register includes more than 7,000 organisations, some 19,000 carbon footprints, 1,273 carbon sink projects and just over 26,000 hectares. The geographical distribution is uneven, with Galicia, Castile and León, Andalusia and Asturias accounting for more than 23,000 hectares. The new 2025 framework aims to improve coordination with regional schemes, strengthen the traceability of carbon sink units and broaden the scope of the register to include event-based carbon footprints, blue carbon and other ecosystem services such as biodiversity.

Future challenges mentioned included the incorporation of forest management methodologies, the increase of density of *dehesas* and the enrichment of pine forests, the expansion of eligible projects following biotic and abiotic disturbances, the ex-post measurement of sequestered carbon, the standardisation of monitoring reports and the updating of certain technical requirements.

Raquel Bravo Rubio (Department of Urban Planning, Environment and Mobility, Madrid City Council) - Madrid Metropolitan Forest

The presentation by Madrid City Council is part of the panel dedicated to increasing forest cover in Spain, focusing on the Madrid Metropolitan Forest project. Raquel Bravo Rubio presented the Madrid Metropolitan Forest as a major green and blue infrastructure initiative integrated into the Madrid 360 Sustainability Strategy. The presentation situated the project within the municipality of Madrid, which has ~~with~~ a resident population of around 3.5 million people, a total area of approximately 60,000 hectares, 6,000 hectares of green spaces managed by the municipality, 5.7 million trees in total and 1.7 million trees under the City Council's direct management. Madrid also has a tree cover of approximately 26 per cent, excluding Monte de El Pardo, and a network of tree-lined streets that is highly valued by citizens and part of the city's identity.

The Metropolitan Forest circles Madrid and aims to improve ecological connectivity in the city by creating new green areas and deploying other green and blue infrastructure tools. Its benefits go beyond the municipal boundary, as the Manzanares River acts as a green corridor connecting the Cuenca Alta del Manzanares Regional Park and the Southeast Regional Park. The speaker stressed that, in a Mediterranean context, planting native shrubs is as important as planting trees, especially to strengthen the functionality of Mediterranean woodland, improve biodiversity and increase resilience.

The project began with an international ideas competition in 2020 and is structured around five differentiated areas. The northern area preserves dryland farming areas and natural values such as the presence of the Iberian imperial eagle; the north-eastern area seeks to connect large urban parks such as Valdebebas and Juan Carlos I through a forest avenue supporting pedestrian and cycling mobility; the south-eastern area, linked to new urban developments and the expected construction of around 100,000 homes over the coming decades, is a key space for public-private cooperation ~~with~~ through the land compensation boards, where the landowners are represented; and the southern area focuses on the renaturalisation of the Manzanares River, including Madrid Río and river parks. Finally, the south-west area, around Cuatro Vientos and the Casa de Campo, connects the peri-urban ecosystems, forming a **green belt**.

The presentation highlighted the long term approach with several initial pilot projects covering around 100 hectares of municipal land, where approximately 35,000 trees and an even greater number of shrubs have already been planted to test the use of native species in urban and peri-urban settings. It also referred to the Manzanares-Gavia-Bulera river ecosystem recovery project, funded by over two million euros from the NextGenerationEU and implemented with CEDEX and the CONAMA Foundation, as well as riparian forest restoration actions. The Metropolitan Forest has already received around EUR 2 million in funding and is accompanied by communication and public engagement measures, including a comic book with 60,000 copies and educational sheets for schools. and environmental education initiatives, including a comic book – 60,000 copies of which have been distributed – and educational resources for schools.

Q&A and discussion based on the session

The discussion first addressed the timeframe of the Metropolitan Forest. Raquel Bravo explained that, given its ambition and strategic nature, the project is conceived over approximately two decades, which requires communicating to citizens that vegetation does not develop within the timeframe of a political term. A question was also raised as to whether the 35,000 trees planted had been, or would be, registered in the EU counter. The response pointed to the need for internal and cross-cutting reflection within the City Council, as several directorates are involved in tree and shrub planting, maintenance and management.

Several questions focused on MITECO's carbon footprint and absorption projects register. Participants asked whether the revised register could recognise not only tree species but also shrubs and scrub species with high biodiversity value, which often entail similar planting and maintenance costs without generating carbon credits. The discussion also addressed the need to strengthen mechanisms for monitoring and verifying project survival, including harmonised reporting standards, control visits by Tragsa and possible independent checks. MITECO noted that some projects have already been removed from the register because they proved unviable or failed to submit monitoring reports, although available resources limit the capacity to inspect all registered projects.

The exchange also covered the relationship between Spain's 2025 Royal Decree and the future EU framework for carbon removals and carbon farming certification. It was explained that the EU methodology is still being developed and that it is not yet clear how national and EU registers will coexist. MITECO indicated its intention to give methodologies a stronger regulatory basis through binding instruments or ministerial orders, rather than relying only on guidance. Participants also

raised doubts about the additionality of afforestation in burnt areas under the future EU framework, a particularly important issue for Mediterranean countries.

Lastly, the debate addressed the traceability of forest reproductive material in peri-urban environments. While forest afforestation has traditionally been subject to controls on provenance, urban plantings have often relied on ornamental or exotic plants. Participants noted that new peri-urban initiatives blur the line between urban and forest planting, making origin, genetic quality and plant health passports increasingly important.

Session three: Increasing the forest cover in Spain - regional initiatives

Ignacio Pérez-Soba (Government of Aragon) - Aragon Reforestation Plan 2024-2027

Ignacio Pérez-Soba presented the Aragon Reforestation Plan 2024-2027 by placing it in the region's long history of afforestation. He recalled milestones such as the first sowings and afforestation actions carried out by forestry districts in Zuera in the nineteenth century, the Agramonte forest nursery and Aragon's role in developing afforestation techniques for arid environments and torrent control works. He referred to emblematic examples such as Canfranc, Daroca, Moncayo, Calatayud and Alhama de Aragón, where historic afforestation has reduced risks, stabilised slopes, protected settlements and created forest areas that are now fully integrated into the landscape.

Today, around 281,000 hectares in Aragon are identified as having been afforested by the forest administration over time. However, the region still has around 1,041,000 hectares of unwooded forest land, even though not all of it can or should be planted. The annual afforestation rate fell from peaks of around 14,000 hectares in 1955-1959, to 4,600 hectares during the ICONA period and to around 95 hectares per year in 2012-2022. The new plan seeks to reverse this trend and act as a turning point.

The plan's objective is to plant 2,000 hectares over four years, increasing the rate from around 95 to around 500 hectares per year. The speaker described this as modest but realistic, given the lack of additional staff or resources, the weakening of the specialised business base and the need to regain momentum after years of limited activity. Land selection first focused on immediate availability, identifying 111,200 hectares managed by the Government of Aragon, and then applied criteria such as potential erosion, areas affected by major forest fires and the willingness of landowners, mostly municipalities. More than 100 municipalities offered land, and work is currently underway on more than 1,200 hectares through projects of different sizes and purposes.

A particularly novel dimension of the plan is forest education and the reconnection of both rural and urban society with afforestation. An itinerant exhibition has been created and adapted to each municipality, accompanied by technical talks and school visits guided by forest officers. A project website also provides resources on afforestation, and communication campaigns have been organised in urban spaces, including advertising at tram stops in Zaragoza.

Eva Padrón Cedrés (Tenerife Island Council) - Reforestation of cloud forest species in the Canary Islands

Eva Padrón Cedrés presented the experience of the Tenerife Island Council in restoration, habitat re-establishment and reforestation in the Macaronesian biogeographical region. The presentation focused on the difficulty of separating habitats, forests and reforestation in Tenerife, where forestry actions are closely linked to terrestrial ecosystem restoration, biodiversity and post-fire management. Since 2011, the Island Council has been working on silviculture, forest uses, biodiversity improvement, naturalisation of Monteverde, naturalisation of Canary pine plantations and replacement of *Pinus radiata* plantations, an alien species on the island.

The main example was the replacement of *Pinus radiata* stands with Monteverde species, especially in areas affected by the 2023 fire, which burned more than 12,000 hectares. In these cases, *radiata* pine stands die after fire, so intervention areas are divided into sectors, works are prioritised according to erosion and damage, and felling and biomass processing are carried out. Follow-up management is essential: the speaker explained that one to five years of continued work may be needed for reforestation to become viable.

The actions aim to restore potential vegetation, create a green firebreak and improve biodiversity by replacing a single species with a wide range of Monteverde-associated flora and fauna. These stands, influenced by trade winds and horizontal precipitation, form humid forests that can protect settlements from fires coming from higher elevations while also reducing fire spread from inhabited areas towards the mountains. Limitations include scarce land availability, the predominance of public land in the areas where work is taking place, intense public use, damage to forest infrastructure during biomass removal and nursery capacity.

The island forest nursery currently produces between 70,000 and 80,000 native plants per year, while needs may reach around 120,000 plants annually. In 2024-2026, the Tenerife forestry services planted 115,000 plants, most linked to restoration after the 2022 and 2023 fires. The case presented involved 20 species - 17 tree species, one shrub species

and two herbaceous species. Although planting is carried out at an average density of 1,200 stems per hectare, natural regeneration is actively managed to reach approximately 2,500 stems per hectare by removing pyrophytic species and unwanted radiata pine regeneration.

Alicia Béliz (Government of Galicia) - Galician forest strategy for afforestation, reforestation and restoration

Alicia Béliz explained that the Galician Forest Strategy is being implemented in a context of highly fragmented land ownership and a predominance of private property. Galicia has more than 11 million non-urban plots and around 1.7 million owners, with an average private plot of 0.66 hectares. Only 1% of Galician forest is owned by the public administration. This structure makes sustainable, profitable and professional management difficult, so the strategy is oriented towards carbon neutrality, biodiversity, the green transition and sustainable socio-economic development.

The strategy is organised around six axes. The first concerns ecosystem services, biodiversity and the multifunctionality of forest ecosystems, with special attention to active management of broadleaf stands, biodiversity conservation, genetic resource improvement and resilience. The second addresses protection, forest health and wildfire prevention, including restoration of burnt areas, damage monitoring, plant health and reorganisation of forest districts. Another axis aims to tackle abandonment and fragmentation through land mobility programmes, joint forest management groups, private management initiatives and the revitalisation of community forests and other local ownership models.

The presentation highlighted the objective of a diverse, ordered, actively managed, resilient and healthy forest. Galicia aims to reduce eucalyptus areas by 5%, transforming around 20,000 hectares towards other species; recover 8,000 hectares of chestnut groves; create additional 8,000 hectares of new chestnut groves for fruit production and another 8,000 for timber; increase silvicultural treatments in conifers; actively manage 20,000 hectares of deciduous broadleaves; and restore 20,000 hectares of riparian forests. It also aims to reach 850,000 hectares under planning or management instruments and 650,000 certified hectares, with support investment of around EUR 50 million.

Public aid under the CAP Strategic Plan / EAFRD is used to steer private investment towards the strategy's objectives. Priority is given to joint forest management groups, community forests that reinvest beyond their obligations, active foresters, forests with management plans and certified forests. Regarding forest reproductive material, Galicia requires plants to originate from registered material and supplies a very large share of the seed used by nurseries. It is also advancing improved conifer planting stock, new seed orchards and a hybrid chestnut seed orchard grafted with traditional Galician varieties.

Javier Ezquerro (Government of Castilla y León) - Forest plantations and restoration

Javier Ezquerro addressed afforestation from a historical, technical and cultural perspective. He recalled that the desire to plant trees has existed for millennia, but that success has always depended on technique, continuity and appropriate frameworks. In Castilla y León, a region with around 5 million hectares of forest land, more than one million hectares have been afforested since 1940, with high-intensity periods under the State Forest Heritage programme and the agricultural land afforestation programme co-financed by EAFRD funds.

He stressed that forest area in Castilla y León has increased by approximately one million hectares since 1960, not only because of planting but also because of subsequent management and silviculture. Many plantation stands have developed understories with broadleaves, bilberries and other habitats that now benefit species such as the brown bear and capercaillie, while also reducing fire risk by transforming former heathlands. Some pine plantations over a century old are already regenerating, showing that what is being planted is not only trees but ecological dynamics capable of perpetuating themselves.

The Castilla y León experience shows that large-scale programmes require strategic design, involvement of companies and landowners, adequate compensation, technical advice, monitoring and medium-term expectations of use. Ezquerro argued that trees also produce wood, pine nuts, cork and other necessary goods, support value chains and create jobs. Forest culture and the integration of forests into the rural economy are therefore conditions for long-term conservation.

Q&A and discussion based on the regional initiatives

The discussion confirmed that land availability differs considerably between regions. In Galicia the main barrier is fragmentation and private ownership, whereas in Tenerife available public land is limited and conditioned by public use of the forest. Aragon, by contrast, noted that it has broad potential on open land under public management, so its main challenge is not space but rebuilding forest culture, operational capacity and political continuity.

The evolution of forest area was also discussed. Nicolas Robert clarified that, at EU level, forest area continues to increase, although more slowly than in previous decades. Regarding Castilla y León, it was explained that the agricultural land afforestation programme has not disappeared, but its weight has been reduced compared with other CAP Strategic

Plan priorities such as damage prevention and restoration. The 20-year compensatory premium for abandoning agricultural land disappeared years ago when the incentive framework changed.

Several exchanges addressed social perceptions of afforestation, in particular debates around the use of pines and the distinction between natural and artificial stands. Speakers argued that many historic plantations have naturalised over time and provide evidence that should be assessed over longer horizons, rather than judged after only a few years. Marta Ballesteros also recalled that EU legislation seeks to cover very different realities across 27 Member States, rather than impose a single perfect model.

Session four: Land availability, governance and long-term management of tree planting initiatives in Spain

Juan Oliet (Polytechnic University of Madrid and Spanish Society of Forest Sciences) - Benefits and barriers for implementing the 3 Billion Trees Initiative in Spain

Juan Oliet presented the results of an internal workshop of the Spanish Society of Forest Sciences, organised in December as part of the Society's contribution to the preparation of the National Restoration Plan. The workshop brought together 36 professionals and addressed Articles 12 and 13 of the Nature Restoration Regulation, focusing on the constraints for meeting the 3 Billion Trees commitment, possible solutions and the scale of Spain's contribution.

The main constraints identified were land availability, funding, difficulties in securing long-term management, the regulatory framework, climate uncertainty and technical capacity. On land availability, the importance of forest associations and the difficulties caused by fragmented private ownership and the identification of plots were emphasised. Potential areas for action that could avoid additionality issues included abandoned mining liabilities, peri-urban forests, diversification of the agricultural landscape through hedges and forest islands, livestock trails, habitats for specially protected species, hydrological-forest restoration, riparian forests and invasive species control.

On financing, proposed mechanisms included the valuation of ecosystem services, carbon and biodiversity credits, bureaucratic simplification and tax measures for small owners. The speaker insisted that tree planting is not only the act of planting, but also requires monitoring, maintenance and corrective action over periods longer than the usual two or three years of guarantee. Regulatory contradictions were also highlighted, particularly in the CAP, which may discourage tree planting on agricultural land because of its impact on eligible agricultural area.

Regarding Spain's contribution, the workshop used an average density of 1,000 stems per hectare, which would imply a theoretical contribution of around 360,000 hectares. However, a more cautious proposal of 100,000 hectares was discussed. Recent MITECO statistics show an average of around 13,000 hectares afforested annually over the last five years. Oliet invited reflection on how to apply additionality, how to count different densities across species and ages, how to treat natural regeneration, and how to steer CAP and future financial framework funding towards high-biodiversity value measures.

Enrique Enciso (Sylvestris) - Private sector experience in forest restoration and carbon projects

Enrique Enciso presented the perspective of a company working on the ground in privately funded reforestation projects linked to the voluntary carbon market. He underlined that one of the most serious challenges for scaling up tree planting is rural depopulation and the lack of generational renewal. Forest work is hard, discontinuous and often less attractive than other sectors, leading to a loss of labour and practical knowledge.

Sylvestris runs the Motor Verde programme, which supports carbon footprint compensation through forest restoration projects. The initial objective was to restore around 70,000 hectares, sequester 16 million tonnes of CO₂ over 40-50 years and plant 70 million trees. The company has vertically integrated the project chain - from seed collection, plant production and project design to authorisations, works, maintenance, monitoring, reporting and verification. It also referred to direct production capacity of close to 7 million plants and operations across the Iberian Peninsula.

In the Spanish Climate Change Office register, Sylvestris has more than 250 projects registered for its clients, close to 20% of the total, and around 6,500 hectares registered, with another 3,000 hectares in progress. These areas could absorb more than 2 million tonnes of CO₂ over 40-50 years, rising above 3.5 million tonnes if the portfolio reaches around 10,000 hectares. Enciso highlighted the importance of MRV - measurement, reporting and verification - and the use of satellite technology and drones for managing large areas.

The presentation also addressed the social return on forest investment. In a project in Grandas de Salime, Asturias, an SROI study estimated that each euro invested generated EUR 6.5 in social return. Enciso also presented early fire detection systems developed with Hispasat, combining cameras, temperature and humidity data, surveillance and own

resources to act rapidly against initial outbreaks. He concluded that the scale of the pledge requires more nurseries, more companies, more forest employment and policies that allow the private sector to act with greater strength and continuity.

Patricia Gómez (Juntos por los Bosques) - The perspective of owners and the forest sector

Patricia Gómez presented Juntos por los Bosques, a national platform created in 2016 that brings together forest owners, companies, industries, certification systems, professional associations, universities and other forestry stakeholders. The platform seeks to build minimum common positions, bring shared proposals to public authorities and represent the forest sector in society.

She recalled that around 72% of Spain's forest area - about 20 million hectares - is privately owned and characterised by small holdings and low profitability. The implementation of the pledge will therefore depend heavily on private owners who must cover the costs of site preparation, quality planting stock, planting, maintenance, replacement, protection against drought and climate risks, and fire prevention. From this perspective, planting is the easiest part; the costly and complex task is ensuring that the planting survives and becomes established.

Juntos por los Bosques argued that the EU target does not fully fit the current economic model unless it is accompanied by structural finance, incentives and real recognition of management costs. Shifting towards less productive models may imply economic losses for owners and increase the risk of abandonment if there is no compensation. The speaker called for stable funding, EU funds or a dedicated forest fund, private investment in real rather than symbolic projects, smart forest taxation, incentives for diversification, support for long-term maintenance and fire prevention as a priority.

Joana Fernandes (LandLife) - Degraded land restoration and public-private partnerships

Joana Fernandes presented LandLife's experience in restoring degraded land in the Iberian Peninsula and other countries in the global north. The organisation has around 60 employees, has implemented around 180 projects and has planted more than 5 million trees in Spain and Portugal, across more than 80 projects and more than 5,200 hectares restored. Around 2 million of these trees have already been registered on the EU platform, although the speaker noted that the register should be updated.

LandLife's model is based on three elements: positive impact on nature, science and technology to improve results and reduce risks, and cooperation with landowners, local partners and regional institutions. Its Iberian office is in Burgos and includes local teams of biologists, foresters and field supervisors. Projects have a 40-year permanence period and are mainly financed through the voluntary carbon market, with LandLife acting as a bridge between landowners or land managers and companies providing funding. The company certifies projects with Verra, while also working on initiatives that can be registered with MITECO.

The speaker highlighted several challenges: projects require extensive planning, long investment periods and returns that may take up to 15 years; carbon credits are not considered financial assets by the European Central Bank; land fragmentation and ownership identification limit scalability; permits can take a long time; and, locally, lack of knowledge or trust can block municipal initiatives. She also noted that biodiverse plantings grow more slowly and generate less carbon than productive plantations, making it necessary to value other benefits such as water, biodiversity, fire prevention and social impact.

Proposed solutions included innovative financing tools to cover the first and riskiest years, platforms connecting small owners, harmonisation of permits across regions, recognition of fire prevention as a financeable ecosystem service, clear certification of co-benefits beyond carbon and better combination of public and private funding.

Clarifications and discussion

The moderator recalled that the 3 Billion Trees Initiative is not the only EU forest policy. Its main focus is biodiversity and climate change because other policies have historically paid more attention to productivity, but this does not mean that the European Union overlooks the productive role of forests. She also clarified the principle of additionality of the 3 Billion Trees Initiative: trees planted in a burnt area can count if the action replaces a monoculture with a more diverse and resilient forest.

Fifth session: Focus on wildfire risk and tree planting

Adrian Tišćan and Gonzalo González Jurado (European Commission, DG ENV) - European regulatory context on wildfire risk

Adrian Tišćan presented the European Commission Communication on integrated wildfire risk management, published in March 2026. He explained that the area burned in the EU has increased over the last 20 years and that, in the previous year, the cumulative burned area exceeded one million hectares. Four of the last five years have also been above average, in parallel with rising temperatures. Data show larger and more intense fires, longer fire seasons and regions not previously exposed to fire risk now facing increasing risk.

The Communication identifies three main drivers: climate change, which increases the likelihood of extreme fire weather; changes in land use and management, especially rural abandonment and the accumulation of flammable biomass; and human activity, which causes most ignitions. Integrated wildfire risk management is defined as a holistic, long-term approach addressing ecological, social, cultural and economic dimensions, not only firefighting.

The Communication sets out tools and support already available at EU level, including financial support, and proposes new actions by the Commission and Member States. Its thematic blocks cover prevention through resilient landscapes and nature restoration, improved data and research, public preparedness, coordinated response through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, post-fire recovery, stronger governance and international engagement. In relation to the workshop, the need to integrate wildfire risk into national restoration plans, landscape planning and CAP-funded measures was highlighted, including species diversification, thinning, firebreaks, extensive grazing and other prevention measures.

Gonzalo González Jurado presented the guidance on Natura 2000 and climate change published on 24 March 2026. The document addresses fire management and the selection of tree and non-tree species in the context of climate change. It recognises that fire is a natural process, but that high-intensity fires are becoming more recurrent and more damaging for species and habitats. The guidance recommends integrated fire management in protected areas, combining traditional infrastructure - firebreaks, water points and road networks - with landscape management strategies and ecosystem-based measures.

These measures include the creation of multifunctional and resilient mosaics, thinning, grazing and prescribed burning. The presentation also clarified legal aspects of the Habitats Directive, such as the treatment of prevention works, emergency operations and appropriate assessments in Natura 2000 sites. On species selection, the document recognises that climate change is altering the distribution of forest species and that assisted migration may be a tool where natural adaptation is too slow. The speaker mentioned the need to keep an open mind in parts of southern Spain where even Aleppo pine is suffering drought mortality, considering species such as *Tetraclinis articulata* where scientifically justified.

Ignacio Rojo (Region of Murcia) - Natural regeneration after forest fires

Ignacio Rojo presented the Region of Murcia's experience with natural regeneration and restoration after major fires and drought episodes. He began with the 1994 Moratalla fire, the largest in the region, which burned 28,000 hectares after a pre-existing drought and during a week when temperatures exceeded 45 degrees. After emergency works, a monitoring programme was developed to diagnose ecosystem evolution and guide restoration decisions.

Monitoring included analysis of land uses, fire severity, natural values, ownership, vegetation evolution and regeneration, leading to the identification of 92 homogeneous units. The Replan project, with EUR 6 million in EU co-financing in 2005-2006, acted on an important part of the burned area to release abundant regeneration and support its development. Around EUR 12 million was estimated to have been invested in the 15 years following the fire.

The presentation also reviewed droughts, bark beetle outbreaks and forest decline affecting Murcia over recent decades. During the 1993-1995 and 2015-2016 droughts, around 18,000 hectares and approximately one million trees were affected in each episode. The most recent drought caused direct mortality through embolism across up to 36,000 hectares and 3 million trees. Overall, more than 100,000 wooded hectares have been affected by fires, droughts or pests, requiring adapted structures, procedures and innovation to reduce stand vulnerability.

In the context of the 3 Billion Trees Pledge, Rojo noted that the principle of the right tree in the right place becomes complex in Murcia because of climate change. Scientific tools, LIFE projects, assisted migration experiences, Fitoclim and other INIA tools can support the selection of species and provenances. In warmer and coastal areas, the historical potential of Aleppo pine needs to be reconsidered, exploring forest models with appropriate densities and coexistence with species such as *Tetraclinis articulata*. Regarding the right purpose, he highlighted hydrological regulation, flood and erosion control, resilience to disturbances, risk reduction and, in some areas, CO2 sequestration.

Concluding remarks

The closing remarks thanked Milieu Consulting, MITECO, the European Commission, the interpreters and all participants for the organisation and exchanges held throughout the day. Guillermo Fernández Centeno noted that the workshop had generated both answers and further questions, which is precisely the value of a workshop aimed at moving the discussion forward. The European Commission underlined the interest of the presentations and the commitment of the institutions involved.

Overall, the second part of the seminar showed that Spain has extensive technical knowledge and highly relevant regional and private experiences to contribute to the 3 Billion Trees Pledge. However, success will depend on moving from isolated plantings to sustainable restoration and management models: with stable finance, planned nursery capacity, traceability of forest reproductive material, long-term monitoring, recognition of ecosystem services, integration of wildfire risk and the active involvement of owners, companies, administrations and citizens.