



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT
Directorate D - Natural Capital
ENV.D.1 - Land Use & Management

Ares
Brussels,

Latvian Forest Certification Council

Thank you very much for your letter of 19 February 2020 related to the recently launched Forest Information System for Europe (FISE) and the forest data for Latvia.

In your letter, you ask for clarification on the forest cover in Latvia, as there are differences between the forest area data provided by the Latvian National Forest Inventory as compared to the forest cover as calculated in FISE.

FISE aims at providing accurate, up-to-date and harmonised data on Europe's forests, and therefore, it uses both statistical data and data derived from the Copernicus earth observation services.

According to the Copernicus Corine Land Cover 2018, and as calculated as land cover changes by the EEA (European Environment Agency) and validated by the EIONET partners, the forest cover of Latvia including forests and transitional woodland is close to constant in the period 2000-2018 (around 3,46 million hectares and 53,7% of the land area). The percentage is close to the one reported by Latvia to the Forest Europe in 2015 although Latvia reports increased forest area.

It is always a challenge to compare forest cover/area assessments from satellite imagery and field measurements due to differences in methodology, definitions (Corine has a 30% threshold for canopy cover compared to the 10% of the internationally agreed definition of forest by FAO), and resolution (Corine has a resolution of 25 hectares). The variations in the percentage may also be due to the assessment of total land area (whether one compares to total country area or total land surface of the country).

FISE is not questioning the area of forests in Latvia, neither the long measuring time series from the Latvian National Forest Inventory. FISE has in its first version chosen to present forest cover only. This means that it includes standing forests under the three Corine Land Cover classes (311, 312 and 313), and is thus much less than forest land

use¹. The applied information stems from the analysis of the latest Corine Land Cover as processed by the Commission's Joint Research Centre, using the Guidos software to assess continuous forest cover and changes in the forest cover within the EEA 39 member countries including Latvia.

We take note, however, that the presentation of the information may be further improved to explain the forest cover definition used for specific visual material. In the coming months, FISE will also include a database with the National Forest Inventories as published on national websites, and it will also allow for downloading the data behind the graphs and maps.

I hope this helps in clarifying the difference in the data that you spotted. Should you have any further detailed questions I would suggest you to contact our colleagues in the European Environment Agency, who are working directly on FISE, notably annemarie.bastrup-birk@eea.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

Claudia OLAZÁBAL
Head of Unit

¹ <https://forest.eea.europa.eu/topics/forest-basic-data>