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# ASIA-PACIFIC FORESTRY COMMISSION

## THIRTIETH SESSION

**Sydney, Australia, 2 - 6 October 2023**

## APFC GOVERNANCE REVIEW

### Executive Summary

This document responds to the request made at the Twenty-eighth Session of the Commission, to review the modalities and governance of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) and to seek ways to enhance its efficiency. The document outlines the main steps in the governance review process and summarizes key findings and recommendations – particularly those developed during an Informal Consultation of Members and organizational partners – for consideration by the Commission.

### Suggested Actions

The Commission may wish to invite countries to:

- welcome the progress made in the APFC Governance Review and invite feedback on the proposed next steps in the reform and arrangements for reporting thereof; and
- explore ways to contribute to strengthening the financing mechanisms in support of inter-sessional functioning and activities of the Commission.

The Commission may wish to invite FAO to:

- follow up on key findings of the APFC governance review and reform options identified, as appropriate, and report on progress made at a next Session as well as to the Twenty-seventh Session of COFO.

*Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2019, at its Twenty-eighth Session, the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) requested that FAO develop a scoping document outlining potential elements and processes for a review of its governance, including budgetary implications (APFC/2019/REP). Relatedly, in 2020, the Twenty-fifth Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) requested that FAO consult with its Regional Forestry Commissions (RFCs) on ways to help facilitate their policy dialogues and technical exchanges to assist them in achieving their members' goals and contributions to international processes and goals (COFO/2020/REP). Similarly, in 2022, the Thirty-sixth Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific recommended that FAO strengthen existing mechanisms of FAO Regional Technical Commissions (including APFC) to ensure that these regional bodies contribute to building stronger linkages and collaboration between FAO and the relevant technical line agencies of the Members in the region (APRC/22/REP).

A draft scoping document was presented at the Twenty-ninth Session of APFC in February 2022. In response, the Commission recommended (APFC/2022/REP) that FAO:

- Circulate the draft scoping report of the APFC governance review for comments.
- Convene an Informal Consultation with nominated representatives from APFC Members and other stakeholders to further discuss and refine proposed options, including budgetary implications, to reform the APFC governance structure to provide greater relevance, efficiency and effectiveness.
- Report on progress made in the APFC governance review at its next Session as well as to the next Session of COFO.

This Secretariat Note describes subsequent progress in implementation of the APFC governance review and proposes some initial steps for reform.

## II. BACKGROUND

APFC is one of six FAO RFCs. It provides a forum for advising and taking action on key forestry issues in Asia and the Pacific. Balancing technical and policy issues, the objectives of APFC are to: provide advice on forest policy formulation; review and coordinate implementation of forest policy at the regional level; exchange information on suitable practices and solutions for technical problems; and develop and support appropriate recommendations for member governments and FAO.

An important role of the Commission is reporting to both COFO and the Regional Conference. Through its inputs to COFO, the Commission provides a primary conduit between Asia-Pacific countries and the global level and plays an important role in defining FAO's operational priorities and shaping its biennial programmes of work in forestry. Similarly, recognizing that two of FAO's main delivery mechanisms – the Regional Priorities and the Country Programming Frameworks – are strongly influenced by the deliberations of the Regional Conference, it is extremely important that forest issues are also discussed within this forum. APFC should provide a clear point of entry to these discussions.

These aspects are reflected in recommendations from the Twenty-sixth session of COFO (COFO/22/REP), which acknowledged the importance of the RFCs and:

- (i) stressed the need for them to have a more policy-relevant role in the FAO Regional Conferences, and invited FAO to support further integration of important regional forest related matters;
- (ii) invited FAO to continue to review and consult with Members on ways to further improve the RFCs as well-established mechanisms for technical and policy dialogue, including through consideration of the ongoing governance reviews, as appropriate; and
- (iii) invited FAO to support further strengthening of the cross-sectoral work of the RFCs, especially on forestry and agrifood systems.

The APFC governance review has progressed through several phases.

- (i) The first phase of the review was initiated in November 2021 and encompassed 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 countries and key partners, and culminated in the development of the scoping document for discussion.
- (ii) In July 2022, an Informal Consultation was conducted as Phase II of the governance review, to share the findings of the scoping document with member country 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) In March 2023, the Nineteenth Meeting of the APFC Executive Committee reviewed and endorsed the draft outline for reporting progress on the governance review at the Thirtieth Session of APFC. On the advice of the Executive Committee, the outline was also shared with Members for their comments and inputs. Based on this advice, the Secretariat has distilled a set of pragmatic reform steps for consideration by the Commission.

### **III. KEY FINDINGS AND PROPOSED OPTIONS FOR APFC REFORM**

The key findings and proposed options for the APFC reform can be clustered into enhancing the policy relevance, strengthening the financing mechanisms for the inter-sessional activities of the APFC, and widening the participation for greater value and reach.

#### **a. To enhance the policy relevance of the Commission**

In regard to the overall relevance of APFC, the Informal Consultation expressed clear recognition and appreciation of the role and functions of APFC in providing a unique platform for regional intergovernmental forestry discussions. It particularly noted the value of APFC as a platform for technical advice and guidance. The Consultation nonetheless identified several divergent views on the exact niche the Commission should occupy. In terms of specific Commission activities, the Consultation noted a perception that APFC is relatively inactive and "silent" during inter-sessional periods. Conversely, Asia-Pacific Forestry Weeks (based around Sessions of the Commission) have been highly appreciated and valued by both member countries and partner organizations. Suggested avenues for strengthening participation in APFC inter-sessional activities (and related communications) included development of some simple form of strategy and work plan document.

With respect to APFC linkages to FAO governance and governing bodies, the Consultation considered that current linkages to COFO (including the important role Chairs of Regional Commissions play in serving on the COFO Steering Committee ) are unique in FAO governance system and provide an important link between regional and global level. Linkages to the Regional Conference would however benefit from greater attention to ensuring that a dedicated space is made available for presentation of regional forestry issues and priorities, and to foster collaboration between forestry and the agricultural sectors in support of agrifood system transformation and to assist in capturing cross-sectoral efficiencies in work programmes.

The Consultation welcomed the potential to strengthen links to other regional and global initiatives and processes noting, in particular, existing linkages with the United Nations Forum on Forests, through the RFC's contribution to the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 and other inputs under the regional dimension of UNFF. In the future, APFC could play a significant role by generating space to discuss technical aspects of forestry topics derived from other global environmental processes. For example, APFC has previously collaborated with other institutional partners to run short workshops to help member countries better understand opportunities and obligations arising from Conferences of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Options forward may include:

- (i) In regard to APFC's overall relevance: (a) strengthening consultation with Members about priorities to be reflected in Session agendas; (b) development of a simple set of strategic priorities, work plan and budget (with specific and timebound actions) to enhance planning, communications, coordination and reporting against APFC priorities and recommendations; (c) inviting Members to report progress made in relation to past APFC recommendations; and (d) updating the existing 'APFC – The First 50 Years' document to incorporate activities over the past 25 years or finding other ways of marking the APFC's impendi<sup>ng</sup> 75th anniversary in 2024.
- (ii) With respect to linkages to FAO governance: strengthening the links between APFC and APCR. This should include, for example, by facilitating in-person participation and engagement of the APFC Chair in the Regional Conference, and in other relevant FAO Statutory Bodies.
- (iii) In regard to linkages to other regional and global initiatives and processes: exploring the potential for greater information sharing among other relevant regional processes (for example, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) initially through engagement with the relevant Secretariats.

**b. To strengthen the financing mechanisms of the Commission**

At present, statutory funding for APFC is earmarked from countries' assessed contributions to FAO's regular budget, which is turn made available at RAP to largely support the Secretariat in convening the formal sessions of the Commission. Funding for substantive inter-sessional activities requires additional extra-budgetary resources.

The Informal Consultation discussed various options for securing additional resources in support of APFC inter-sessional activities. Several options for national support were identified including additional voluntary funding contributions, secondments of national experts, sponsorships of Associate Professional Officers, United Nations Volunteers and/or interns.

Pulling together multiple smaller financial contributions from member countries and organizational partners is an approach that has been used successfully in the past and will continue to offer potential for future activities. Prospects for establishment of a voluntary trust fund were discussed, but received little initial support.

Options forward may include:

- (i) strengthening efforts to attract support through existing channels (including secondments and sponsorship of additional human resources), including to sponsor spaces for informal dialogue such as in the past during Asia-Pacific Forestry Week;
- (ii) preparation of a simple work plan and budget to help promote APFC activities and attract voluntary contributions; and
- (iii) enhancing the cost-efficiency of some APFC activities through greater use of virtual meetings and dialogues (including for Executive Committee Meetings).

**c. To strengthen the participation and reach of the Commission to other government agencies and stakeholders beyond forestry agencies**

Formal membership of APFC is limited to national governments in the Asia-Pacific region, with national representation at APFC sessions often (but, not exclusively) assigned to national forestry agencies. Global and regional forestry NGOs also regularly participate in Sessions as observers. The Informal Consultation considered the potential merits and drawbacks of seeking to expand participation in APFC Sessions and/or inter-sessional activities beyond traditional APFC actors, recognizing that forest and forestry outcomes are often strongly influenced by external sectors (and agencies operating within these), including finance, agriculture, urban development, water and so forth.

The Informal Consultation recognized the value of enhanced dialogues and collaboration with other sectors, while also recognizing considerable value in maintaining APFC as primarily a dedicated space for forestry. However, significant value could likely be realized through greater engagement with the private sector – especially via private sector associations and through the Advisory Committee on Sustainable Forest-based Industries (ACFSI) – particularly in inter-sessional activities. Similarly, explicit engagement with representatives of relevant youth and indigenous peoples' organizations was also encouraged.

Options forward may include:

- (i) strengthening engagement with other bodies of relevance to the agenda of the Commission session: (a) representatives of youth and indigenous peoples' organizations; (b) private sector, including ACSFI; and (c) regional and global financing institutions; and
- (ii) strengthened collaboration with relevant FAO-hosted processes (including in other sectors) where appropriate – for example, One Health activities, or the COFO Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems.