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EUROPEAN BIOECONOMY POLICY FORUM

Terms of Reference

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1. Purpose

These Terms of Reference set out the rationale for establishing the European Bioeconomy Policy Forum (EBPF) and outline the ways in which its members will work together to accomplish shared goals. They propose a light governance structure and basic working modalities that ensure impact, while preserving the informal and transparent nature of the forum. The EBPF is established for an indeterminate duration and registered as a European Commission Special Group (S 20200).

2. Background

Climate change, biodiversity loss, soil degradation and depletion of natural resources are foremost among this generation's defining challenges. Humankind's impact on earth's resources, biogeochemical cycles and ecosystems has been far-reaching, pushing the earth beyond its natural limits.

At the same time, the need to achieve sustainability constitutes a strong incentive to modernise our industries and to reinforce Europe's position in a highly competitive global economy, thus ensuring its self-reliance and the prosperity of its citizens. To tackle these challenges, we must improve and innovate the way we produce, process, deliver and consume food, products and materials within healthy ecosystems through a sustainable bioeconomy.

The bioeconomy covers all sectors and systems that rely on biological resources (animals, plants, micro-organisms and derived biomass, including organic waste), their functions and principles.

It includes and interlinks: land and marine ecosystems and the services they provide; all primary production sectors that use and produce biological resources (agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture); and all economic and industrial sectors that use biological resources and processes to produce food, feed, bio-based products, energy and services.

To be successful, the European bioeconomy needs to have sustainability and circularity at its heart. This will drive the renewal of our industries, the modernisation of our primary production systems, the protection of the environment and will enhance biodiversity.

As a response to these challenges, the European Commission adopted an updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy in 2018 through its Communication "*A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: Strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment*"¹ that proposes 14 concrete actions across three priority areas:

1. Strengthen and scale-up the bio-based sectors, unlock investments and markets.
2. Deploy local bioeconomies rapidly across Europe.
3. Understand the ecological boundaries of the bioeconomy.

A coherent and supportive policy framework is crucial for creating the enabling environment for developing and scaling-up a circular and sustainable bioeconomy. Since the first EU Bioeconomy Strategy in 2012, bioeconomy principles and cross-cutting objectives have been brought to the attention of national and regional policymakers across the EU, reflected in the number of countries and regions that have now adopted or are developing a dedicated bioeconomy strategy². In response to Member States (MS) requests for **increased cooperation and knowledge exchange** on

¹ COM(2018) 673 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0673>

² Dedicated bioeconomy strategies have been adopted in 9 MS, Norway and the UK, strategies are under development in 6 MS, a sub-regional and macro-regional initiatives exist and more than 50 regions have dedicated strategies (as of November 2019). A number of MS also have dedicated blue bioeconomy strategies and/or scientific or funding programmes. More information is available at the European Commission Knowledge Centre for Bioeconomy: https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/visualisation/bioeconomy-different-countries_en

bioeconomy policy through networks of MS³, an action was developed under the updated Bioeconomy Strategy to set up a dedicated forum for MS (sub-action 2.3.ii of priority area 2).

3. Rationale

The EBPF fulfils the European Commission's commitment to establish this forum. It also addresses specific policy needs among the ministries responsible for developing and implementing bioeconomy policy across EU MS.

The bioeconomy **spans multiple policy sectors** (including agriculture, forestry, fisheries & aquaculture, food, bio-based industry, climate, environment and circular economy) giving rise to a variety of complex policy issues. There is currently **no forum for dialogue on bioeconomy policy among MS and the Commission**. A dedicated forum for multipartite exchange at MS level is needed to facilitate sharing of best practices and coordinated approaches in developing policy solutions.

The green transformation of our economy will require MS to **find ways to deliver on climate-neutrality, ecosystem protection and restoration, circularity and sustainability**, including by leveraging the **significant EU funds** mobilised recently through the European Green Deal, Just Transition Fund and the Recovery & Resilience Facility. Bioeconomy solutions will play a significant role in achieving the desired environmental, economic and social transitions. This forum supports MS in those efforts through knowledge and best-practice exchange. It also creates a **critical mass of voices on the bioeconomy** – a unified and strengthened platform for MS to put forward and exchange views with each other and the Commission, leading to concrete developments and actions. Furthermore, it serves to mobilise key public and private actors in the bioeconomy at national and regional level, and to support their integration and investment in bio-based solutions and bioeconomy value chains. Links with the proposed European Partnership for a circular bio-based Europe also provide opportunities to enhance impact across MS and value chains.

This forum also allows for **structured dialogue between the Commission and MS**. It provides an opportunity to (i) engage and build the knowledge base on key bioeconomy-relevant policy developments and best practices at MS and EU level, and (ii) seek input from MS on pertinent issues in order to guide the implementation of the European Bioeconomy Strategy and inform wider policy developments.

4. Intervention logic

The intervention logic for the EBPF is summarised overleaf. The overall goal is to **provide a forum for dialogue and knowledge exchange** among MS to support the strategic joint advancement of the bioeconomy in Europe. It is underpinned by five specific objectives, which describe the approach to achieving the overall goal, namely to:

- Support networking and interaction at MS level
- Enhance cooperation and best practice exchange
- Shape a concrete agenda of joint actions
- Increase the visibility and potential of the bioeconomy at EU and MS level
- Enable policy feedback and analysis in MS and the EU

Activities will be developed in a **“bottom-up”** way, within the framework defined by the Commission, and prioritised according to their relevance to MS and expected impact. The permanent structure of the EBPF will comprise standing groups of high-level officials convened to address topics at a **strategic/political level (High-level Group)** and expert officials having day-to-day responsibility for

³ A result of the first meeting of national bioeconomy coordinators organised by the EC (16/3/2018, Brussels, 22 Member States present).

bioeconomy policy development convened to focus on **operational** aspects (**Expert-level Group**). These permanent groups will be supplemented, as relevant, by ad-hoc, time-limited **Working Groups (WGs)** convened to work on a specific bioeconomy issue or sector. Activities may include joint reflection work, mutual learning activities, joint work on specific data and knowledge or multilateral/interregional cooperation on specific topics or bioeconomy sectors. The forum will also complement and coordinate with relevant international initiatives, such as the International Bioeconomy Forum and Global Bioeconomy Summit, which support a global policy dialogue on the bioeconomy.

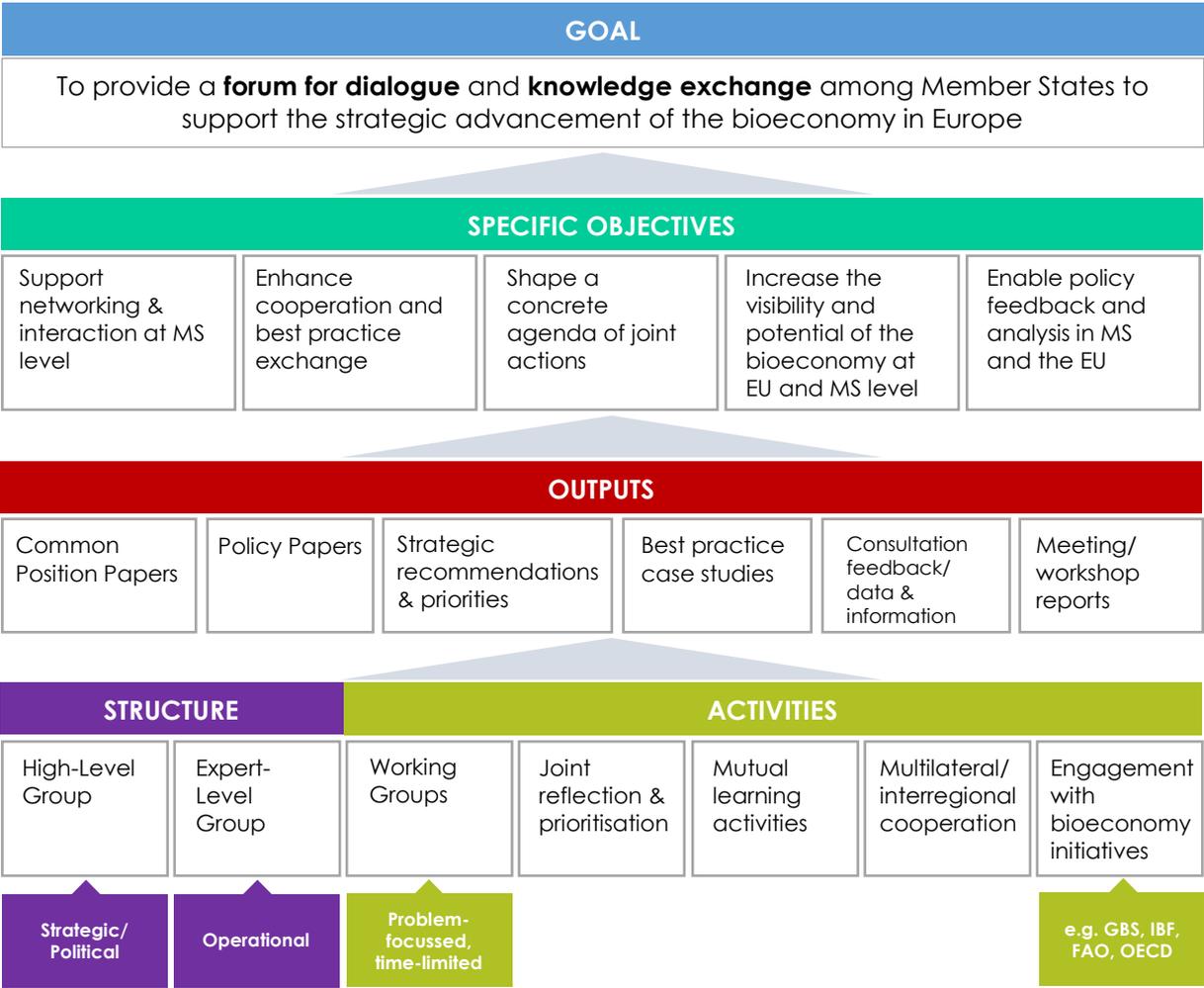


Figure 1: Intervention logic for the European Bioeconomy Policy Forum. The permanent structure, highlighted in purple, will be supplemented, as required, by ad-hoc, time-limited Working Groups convened to work on a specific problem.

5. Approach & Scope

EBFP members will strive to build a more **cohesive community** of bioeconomy policy actors better able to respond to challenges and to unlock the full potential of the bioeconomy at EU and Member State level. The approach will be to focus on finding **practical ways** to share and exchange information, enhance cooperation, and connect actors and instruments in order to make a real impact. The logical sequence behind each delivery-focussed activity could be to define the issue (its boundaries and impacts), gather interested participants to elaborate a course of action and collaborate to create a solution. To do this, the EBPF will build on the expertise, experience, systems, practices and processes existing within the group of members.

The forum will have both a long-term focus (aimed at more strategic objectives, such as capacity building or future-oriented policy discussions) and a short-term focus (having the flexibility to respond to emerging priorities, opportunities or policy developments). Forum activities could be co-developed by the members under **four broad themes**, reflecting the needs and priorities at the time:

1. **Better mainstreaming**: of the bioeconomy into systemically important instruments, leveraging investments, supporting multi-level governance solutions, increasing synergies between policy instruments
2. **Better cooperation**: between and within Member States, exploiting existing structures and initiatives
3. **Better knowledge**: building the evidence base for informed policymaking in support of a circular and sustainable bioeconomy
4. **Better communication and inclusion**: focussing on citizens and stakeholders and their engagement in the bioeconomy

Core activities will be scoped and planned six months in advance, and elaborated in a Work Plan, while ad-hoc short-term activities/discussions can also be proposed outside of the Work Plan in response to emerging needs or priorities.

6. Expected impacts

- ▶ **Strengthening the contribution of the EU bioeconomy** to the EU Green Deal objectives at national and regional level and acceleration of the implementation of bioeconomy strategies
- ▶ **Enhanced and open knowledge base** on bioeconomy issues, enablers and initiatives in key policy areas (e.g. R&I, education, regional development, strategy evaluation, investment)
- ▶ **Greater alignment** of bioeconomy policies among MS at a national and macro-regional level, taking into account the different local circumstances
- ▶ A **shared vision** and **reinforced political context** with better visibility for a sustainable and circular bioeconomy in Europe
- ▶ Increased effectiveness through **capacity building**
- ▶ **Strategic direction** from MS and the EC to guide the implementation of bioeconomy strategies and to inform wider policy developments

7. Governance

7.1 *Membership & Observers*

The forum will be an informal, self-regulated body **open to participation from all MS**. Nominations for representatives from **national ministries/authorities with political responsibility** for bioeconomy strategy development (“pen-holders”) will be invited, to include **1-2 high-level** (director level and above) and **1-2 expert-level** (having day-to-day responsibility for bioeconomy policy) representatives per MS. Options for hybrid physical/virtual participation will be explored to ensure that more than one relevant Ministry can take part. MS representatives participate voluntarily in the forum, **at their own expense**. They commit to actively contributing to EBPF initiatives in which they have an interest (e.g. to the drafting of agendas or documents and participation in meetings). For certain activities (e.g. particular WGs), the members may be assisted or replaced by experts in the field. The costs related to the participation of experts should also be covered by the Member States. The creation of **National Mirror Groups** to set national priorities and positions is encouraged (voluntary basis).

Relevant DGs of the **European Commission** will also be actively involved, at both the high level (Directors) and expert level (Policy and Scientific Officers).

Broad engagement across the EU institutions is encouraged through the participation of nominated bioeconomy representatives from the **European Parliament**, **European Committee of the Regions** and **European Economic and Social Committee** at both the high level and expert level. These representatives will be invited to engage in the meetings and activities, including WGs, accepting the same commitments to contribute actively as all other participants. However, they do not count towards the consensus⁴.

The Secretariat must be promptly notified of any changes to nominated representatives so that the membership list can be updated.

Horizon Europe Associated countries could be invited (with the agreement of the members) to participate in specific meetings or discussions.

7.2 Secretariat & Co-Chair

The **Secretariat** will be the primary administrative support for the EBPF. It will ensure the links between Co-Chairs, Members and WGs (as appropriate). The Secretariat will ensure regular follow-up of commitments taken by the EBPF and will seek information from activity leaders in relation to their work and progress. The **European Commission** will undertake the role of the EBPF Secretariat for the first three years, unless otherwise decided by the forum members.

The European Commission will also provide the **Co-Chair**. For the first two years of the forum, the EC Co-Chair for the high-level group will be the Director of the Healthy Planet Directorate, DG Research & Innovation. After the first two years, the European Commission will nominate the Co-Chair for the following two-year period. A European Commission participant in the expert-level group will act as Co-Chair in that group.

The Member States **Co-Chair** will be the high-level and expert-level representatives of the Member State holding the EU Council Presidency at the time, based therefore on a six-month term length.

7.3 Meetings & Decisions

The members will aim to have **High-level** meetings **every six months**, fitting within the EU Council Presidency calendar. **Expert-level** meetings will take place in between, as required.

Decisions relating to the functioning and major activities of the EBPF (e.g. adoption and changes to the Terms of Reference, agreement of the Work Plan and setting-up of related WGs) will be taken by the Member States and the Commission **by consensus** in so far as possible, in a meeting or by written procedure. In the event where a consensus is not reachable, the Co-Chairs will seek a convergent outcome and may decide to put a decision to a vote by a simple majority of the members (one vote per Member State and one vote for the European Commission).

Meetings, when not virtual, may be organised on European Commission premises or MS may be invited to provide venues for meetings, for example during their term as Co-Chair in their country of origin or by securing rooms in their Permanent Representations.

The Secretariat and Co-Chairs will be responsible for circulating meeting documents, including a draft agenda, in advance (aiming for two weeks prior to the meeting).

7.4 Working Groups

Ad-hoc, time-limited WGs may be established to focus on specific topics/problems. The WGs will be organised on the basis of variable geometry, with participation open to all MS and EU institutions based on specific interests.

⁴ Therefore, decisions concerning the EBPF can be taken without their approval.

The creation of a new WG would require:

1. The identification of a lead (and possibly a co-lead);
2. The approval of the WG by the members;
3. The participation in the WG of at least 4 members.

The benefit of tackling the specific challenge at European level would have to be clearly explained.

7.5 Practicalities

The working language of the EBPF is English. Internal documents will be shared through e-mail or a centralised document repository. The European Commission will make documents relating to the EBPF available online, in particular the meeting agendas, minutes and other relevant background documents.