Press Release

Brussels, March 31, 2026

From waste to value: European wood-based panel sector scales circular business models with advanced recycling technologies

Wood recycling for material use is a prime showcase of circularity in European industry, where panel producers leverage digital technology to boost new markets. The EU's Bioeconomy Strategy and the upcoming Circular Economy Act can foster higher resilience and competitive growth while lowering emissions, by creating the right policy framework for investments, research and innovation in the wood waste sector. These best practices and policy options were presented and discussed at the recent EcoReFibre Policy Conference in Brussels, in which over 70 experts participated.

On March 25, 2026, the Policy Conference "Unlocking Circularity and Market Potential from Wood Waste" brought together stakeholders from policy, industry and civil society in Brussels, hosted by the European Panel Federation (EPF) and the InnovaWood network, alongside the EcoReFibre consortium. The conference presented the results of the EU project and offered a platform to discuss and to enhance jointly the recommendations of the EcoReFibre Policy Roadmap supporting wood, circular economy and biobased sectors. The main purpose is to facilitate wider adoption and mainstreaming of innovative circular technologies and business models for wood waste valorisation, and scale them in different regional and national contexts. Europe has a unique opportunity to position the forest-based sector right in the heart of the Circular Bioeconomy.

Stefano Soro, European Commission, DG GROW – Head of Unit I4 for Sustainable Products

"The Circular Economy Act: "Great to see circularity in action with EcoReFibre. This shows that a circular model can effectively prevent waste production. It is fully aligned with the ambitions of the Circular Economy Act, aiming to accelerate the EU's transition towards a circular economy and double the circular material use rate."

Christian Holzleitner, European Commission, DG CLIMA - Head of Unit for Land Economy and Carbon Removals

"Good market incentives are needed all along the value chain to support the sustainable transition."

Adelaide Alves, Research and Development Group Director at Sonae Arauco, EcoReFibre Partner

"It has been a great pleasure to work together and connect the dots between the different actors through EcoReFibre, helping to pave the way for fibreboard recycling."

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In the afternoon workshop sessions, the participants were invited to discuss their views and positions and help codesign actionable policy recommendations and research needs. All these inputs will be compiled in a report to the European Commission as input for the upcoming Circular Economy Act.

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Background

Europe is aiming to pioneer the Circular Economy fostering higher resilience, competitive growth while lowering emissions and environmental impacts, underpinned by the *Bioeconomy Strategy* (November 2025) and the upcoming *Circular Economy Act* (expected September 2026). Nearly 47 million tonnes of wood waste are generated in the European Union (2022), yet only around 40% (15 million m³ solid wood equivalent) of EU wood waste is being recycled today, while about 60% is used for energy recovery.

The EcoReFibre project, funded with 12 million EUR by the Horizon Europe programme from 2022 to 2026 (grant no. 101057473) is a collaboration of 20 partners from 7 countries that is coordinated by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). Five industry pilots demonstrate how circular economy approaches, combined with innovative and digital-supported technologies, ensure the supply of secondary raw materials. These pilots include the sorting and extraction of wood fibres and fines, and their conversion to valuable products, i.e. fibreboard and insulation products, particleboard and biocomposites. Through these pilots the project could demonstrate that fibreboard recycling from wood waste is technologically and economically viable at the industrial level and is ready to boost the market.

The focus must now be on upscaling high-quality waste supply at volume and on creating circular business models and markets to enhance the wood panel industry's leading role in Europe. The **EcoReFibre Strategic Roadmap** pinpoints challenges, drivers and barriers and sets out research and policy recommendations how to unlock circularity and market potential from wood waste in Europe. The Roadmap (54 pages) can be downloaded here: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17473127

Contact

European Panel Federation (EPF) represents the manufacturers of wood-based panels being particleboard, dry process fibreboard (MDF), oriented strand board (OSB), hardboard, softboard and plywood. EPF has members in 30 European countries. The EU wood panel industry has a turnover of about 25 billion euro every year and provides over 100,000 jobs in Europe. The production of wood-based panels in the EU-27 (+EFTA) in 2022 was an estimated 59.8 million m³. **europanels.org**

InnovaWood mission is to foster innovation and bring business benefit to the entire value chain from forestry to wood, to furniture and construction. InnovaWood provides a European platform to share knowledge, latest information and follow developments as well as innovative trends. InnovaWood aims to provide a strategic orientation to the European research and innovation ecosystem which is evolving in response to the global challenges. **innovawood.com**

Press contacts

Florence Kuijl, Communication manager, InnovaWood, Brussels, Belgium
florence.kuijl@innovawood.eu | +33 767 84 83 07

Aline Kongo, Administrative Officer, European Panel Federation, Brussels, Belgium
info@europanels.org | +32 2 556 25 89

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