

# National Poplar Commission of Sweden

Country Report  
Period 2004 through 2007

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## Activities Related to Poplar and Willow Cultivation and Utilization in Sweden

### I. POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Europe and Sweden are implementing strategies to achieve greenhouse gas emission objectives, including ambitious targets for renewable energy. In Sweden, biomass production with willows, aspens and poplars on agricultural land will play a key role in this development. During recent years, Sweden has been rather successful in introducing biomass as fuel for heat and electricity production. This success was initially the result of a combination of exogenous success factors such as high levels of available forestry resources, a strong forest products industry, and the existence of an established network of district heating systems. However, even in this context, policy instruments were required to support and guide the development of biomass as an energy source for heat and electricity. The most important regulations supporting this development were:

- 1970- present, (rising) energy taxes
- 1991 Carbon Tax & Energy Tax, focus on heat
- 1997 – 2002 Investment subsidies
- 2000 Carbon tax increases
- 2003 Technology-independent Green Electricity Certificate system introduced
- 2004 Tax on electricity for Households and Services
- 2004 Reduced Combined Heat and Power Plant (CHP) Tax

The general energy policy has supported biomass for energy over the entire period, although specific policies have changed with time. Research, development and demonstration have been continuously supported, and some subsidy schemes have been applied within the frame of national Swedish as well as European regulation.

### II. SUMMARY STATISTICS

A template, summarizing statistics of key parameters in poplar and willow culture, production and trade is found in Annex I. The template appears designed for poplar forestry. Poplars and willows are hardly used at all in Swedish forestry, which made it difficult to supply the relevant information.

### III. TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Poplars, aspens (*Populus*) and willows (*Salix*) are superior in short rotation forestry under the cool-temperate to boreal climate of Sweden, due to the fast growth rate in combination with good cold hardiness of these trees (Weih 2004). Apart from their

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great potential for biomass production, those trees can enrich the coniferous forests of boreal regions and increase biodiversity in open agricultural landscapes of the boreal zone (Weih 2006, Weih and Nordh 2007). Further, plantations of *Populus* and *Salix* can serve as tools for the amelioration of environmental problems at local (e.g. phytoremediation) and global scale (e.g. increased greenhouse effect) (Dimitriou and Aronsson 2005, 2008; Grelle et al. 2007). Swedish researchers also actively contribute to the discussion of climate change effects on forest ecosystems, a discussion in which research results from *Populus* species traditionally have great impact (e.g. Hyvönen et al. 2007). The biomass yields achieved in Swedish short rotation forestry and the appropriate production systems appear not principally different from other regions in the world, but there are some climatic peculiarities (e.g., high-latitude photoperiodic conditions in combination with cool and “oceanic” climate), which affect choice of genotype/variety, production system and management actions. During the last 4 years, Swedish R&D activities regarding *Populus* and *Salix* have addressed the whole range of issues from genetics/genomics research through ecological questions related to pest control, nature conservation and biodiversity, to bioenergy systems approaches where poplars and willows are discussed as most interesting alternatives to other energy crops (e.g. Berndes and Börjesson 2007, Börjesson 2007).

## 1. *Populus*

Traditionally Swedish forestry and agriculture showed little interest in growing poplars and aspens. Test trials with *Populus* species as well as some small-scale breeding was performed by the Swedish match industry during the period 1940s to 1960s, but no large efforts were done to introduce poplar at a commercial scale. More recently, the increasing interest in biomass plantations on agricultural land, along with the selection of *Populus* as a model tree in genome sequencing programs, has sparked of a greatly increased interest in *Populus* research and culture also in Sweden. Thus, *Populus* biomass production on agricultural land is now regarded as a promising potential component of sustainable bioenergy systems in Sweden (e.g. Rytter 2004, 2006, Börjesson 2007).

### *Production and management research*

The specific environmental conditions in Sweden, particular the northern-latitude photoperiodic conditions in combination with mild summers and harsh winters, require specific breeds adapted to the Swedish climate and possibly also specific management methods. No long-term Swedish poplar breeding program has been established so far.

Test trials with various genotypes have however been established and investigated. For example, 108 genotypes of *P. trichocarpa* and hybrids between *P. trichocarpa* and *P. deltoides* were evaluated for growth rate, phenology, frost hardiness and pest resistance under different fertilization and irrigation regimes by Christersson (2006), who concluded that fertilisation, but not irrigation, can be economically motivated under the conditions in Sweden. In southern Sweden 140 poplar clones, mainly collected from Holland and Belgium, have been tested during 10-14 years. As a result 15 clones were selected for mass propagation and commercial use (Stener 2004). The plant material consists of *P. trichocarpa*, *P. balsamifera*, *P. deltoides* and *P. nigra*, and hybrids between them. Hybrid aspen breeding work for southern Sweden was resumed around 1985 and has resulted in 15 clones recommended for commercial use

(Stener & Karlsson 2004). This plant material can now be ordered from Swedish nurseries.

In addition, a method for rapid clone testing was evaluated on young *Populus* plants (Karacic and Weih 2006). Traditional management questions, such as the development of biomass equations for Swedish *Populus* stands (Johansson 2006) and a study of the effect of rotation period on *Populus* biomass production (Eriksson and Johansson 2006) are in the focus of research programs. Management regimes that combine early harvests and thinning with conventional forestry techniques are being developed and tested for hybrid aspen (*Populus tremuloides* x *P. tremula*) grown under Swedish conditions (Rytter and Stener 2005, Rytter 2006, Rytter and Werner 2007). Very recently (2007), test trials of various *Populus* genotypes were established along a latitudinal gradient from southern to northern Sweden, but evaluation of growth and other parameters was being started only recently and no results are available so far.

#### *Genetics and genomics research, breeding*

There are currently two new *Populus* cultivars registered at the Swedish Forestry Agency. One is hybrid aspen (No. KB-002) consisting of 15 clones, the other is a mixture of poplars (No. KB-003) also consisting of 15 clones. Both cultivars were tested by The Forestry Research Institute of Sweden (Stener 2004, Stener & Karlsson 2004). Apart from this, Swedish researchers are actively involved in the sequencing of the *Populus* genome (e.g. Sterky et al. 2004, Sjödin et al. 2006, Tuskan et al. 2006) and the genomics research initiated by the sequencing activities. Studies are being performed on phenological traits (e.g. autumn senescence) that are responsible for climatic adaptations in European aspen (*P. tremula*) (e.g. Andersson et al. 2004, Ingvarsson 2005, Ingvarsson et al. 2006, Hall et al. 2008). For example, *P. tremula* genotypes were collected from twelve natural populations across a latitudinal gradient in Sweden and grown in common gardens (the *SwAsp* collection; Luquez et al. 2008). Other foci of the Swedish *Populus* genomics research are on the processes involved in wood formation (e.g. Djerbi et al. 2004, Aspeborg et al. 2005, Israelsson et al. 2005, Andersson-Gunneras et al. 2006, Björklund et al. 2007, Gray-Mitsumune et al. 2008, Mellerowicz and Sundberg 2008) and the functional genomics of plant – pathogen relationships (e.g. Smith et al. 2004).

## **2. Salix**

Historically, the cultivation of willows was performed at a rather small scale until relatively recently, when the potential of willow as bioenergy crop came into focus. Today Sweden is one of the few countries in the world where willow cultivation exceeds poplar growing.

#### *Commercialisation of willow production for bioenergy use*

Research on willows for the purpose of biomass production was firstly initiated in Sweden in the late 1960s in response to a predicted shortage of raw material for the pulp and paper industry. Thus, in Sweden, willow cultivation as a source of biomass for energy purposes has been developed within the frame of a National Energy Forestry Programme and expanded from a few hectares around 1970 to about 16 000 ha by the end of the 1990s. The development of willow culture in Sweden (and

elsewhere) is described by Kuzovkina et al. (2008). The research and development of willow culture in Sweden was accompanied by commercialization of both production system and breeding. Historically, the rapid development of commercialization and large-scale implementation of *Salix* culture in Sweden was favored by, among other things, the existence of many district heating systems in Sweden (Hoffmann and Weih 2005). Most commercial willow plantations in Sweden are today administrated by the Federation of the Swedish Farmers Coops, through the company Lantmännen Agrobränsle AB located in central Sweden. This enterprise has contacts with subcontractors and utility operators and guarantees the proper handling of the crop through advisory service. Lantmännen Agrobränsle AB takes also care of harvest and delivery of the willow wood chips to the closest district heating plant. Since a wave of commercial *Salix* planting rolled over Sweden in the early 1990s, many of the first plantations were terminated or reduced much sooner. The reasons for this retreat are analysed and evaluated by Helby et al. (2006) and Rosenqvist (2007). A particular problem is the high risk that farmers face when planting *Salix*, as future demand is uncertain and prices difficult to predict.

#### *Production and management research*

The implementation and commercialisation of willow culture in Sweden was prepared and is being followed up by a bunch of research projects dealing with all aspects of production biology, ecology and pest control. During recent years, the research has increasingly focused on aspects with great relevance for breeding, especially under different kinds of environmental stress. For example, plant physiological key traits for shoot biomass production in young, pot-grown plants compared to mature, field-grown trees are being identified (Weih and Nordh 2005, Weih and Rönnberg-Wästljung 2007) and water relations were studied with particular foci on water use efficiency, drought responses and the possibilities for breeding (Wikberg and Ögren 2004, Weih et al. 2006, Wikberg 2006, Linderson et al. 2007, Wikberg and Ögren 2007). Also the processes involved in cold hardiness (hardening and dehardening) and the implications for breeding were addressed (Hjelm and Ögren 2004, Lennartsson and Ögren 2004 a, b). In addition, research has focused on long-term stand development in relation to management, plant material and site characteristics in Sweden (Nordh and Verwijst 2004, Nordh 2005). The work on *Salix* physiology and long-term dynamics has generated valuable information for modelling of biomass growth in willow plantations on a stand basis (e.g. Sannervik et al. 2006). The long-term development of biomass production in willow plantations is greatly affected by the dynamics of pests and diseases and much research has been allocated to pest and disease problems. For example, the induction of certain types of insect resistance is being studied (Höglund and Larsson 2005, Höglund et al. 2005), as well as the factors affecting palatability of willow leaves for herbivores (Albrechtsen et al. 2004, 2007, Glynn et al. 2004, 2007). Also the factors affecting willow leaf beetles are under investigation with particular focus on the common management practice of willow plantations and the possibilities for biological control (Björkman et al. 2004, Dalin et al. 2004, Björkman and Ahrné 2005, Björkman and Eklund 2006, Fernandez et al. 2007). Another field of research addresses bacterial infections of willows and the possibility of a combined effect of frost and bacterial disease resulting in the severe dieback of trees observed in some commercial *Salix* plantations in Sweden (Nejad et al. 2004, 2006, Cambours et al. 2005).

### *Phytoremediation and vegetation filter applications*

During recent years in Sweden, the use of nutrient-rich residues as an alternative, cost-efficient fertilization method was developed in parallel with the development of appropriate production systems for willow culture as a source of biomass for energy purpose (Dimitriou and Aronsson 2005, Mirck et al. 2005). The principal residues used in Sweden are municipal wastewater, landfill leachate, log-yard runoff, sewage sludge and wood-ash and the benefits are both environmental and economic (Rosenqvist and Ness 2004, Berndes et al. 2004, Berndes and Börjesson 2007). Around 30 large-scale phytoremediation systems irrigated with different wastewaters have been established in Sweden and about 10 000 ha of short-rotation willow coppice are fertilized with sewage sludge (Dimitriou and Aronsson 2005). A series of research activities has been connected to phytoremediation applications in Sweden using *Salix*. For example, biomass allocation and wood fuel quality were studied in willow stands fertilised with sludge, ash and sludge-ash mixtures (Adler 2007, Adler et al. 2008a, 2008b), irrigation with landfill leachate has been shown to increase willow growth and to not result in excessive nutrient drainage (Dimitriou and Aronsson 2008), and high retention ability for some critical substances (i.e. organic carbon, phenols and phosphorus) was demonstrated when log-yard runoff was applied in willow plantations (Jonsson et al. 2006). Monitoring of pests and diseases on leaves of willows fertilised with wastewater, urine and sewage sludge revealed variable results compared to untreated willows (Åhman and Wilson 2008). Other research addresses one of the main concerns for the sustainability of commonly applied sludge-ash treatments in commercial willow plantations, i.e., the amount of heavy metals (especially cadmium, Cd) remaining in the soil. Results show that the amount of Cd removed with the harvested shoots in a willow field is much higher than the amount of Cd supplied with sludge and ash application (Dimitriou 2005). Laboratory studies focused on the physiological effects of heavy metal treatment on willow and demonstrated great genetic differences in heavy metal sensitivity and accumulation among willow genotypes (Lux et al. 2004, Wang and Greger 2004, Greger et al. 2005). Possible environmental hazards associated with wastewater treatments on willow plantations, e.g. N leaching and N<sub>2</sub>O emissions into the atmosphere, are monitored and results so far indicate minimal risks, whilst biomass growth is higher than the average for commercial short rotation willow coppice in Sweden (Grelle et al. 2007).

### *Genetics and breeding*

Today, all commercial breeding of *Salix* in Sweden is located at the company Lantmännen Agrobränsle AB, which has registered the following four willow cultivars during the period from 2004 to 2007: 'Karin' (((*Salix schwerinii* x *S. viminalis*) x *S. viminalis*) x *S. burjatica*), 'Doris' (*S. dasyclados*), 'Nora' (*S. burjatica* x *S. viminalis*), 'Klara' (((*S. burjatica* x *S. viminalis*) x *S. burjatica*) x (*S. viminalis* x (*S. schwerinii* x *S. viminalis*))). The major species used in the Swedish breeding program are *S. viminalis* and *S. dasyclados*, but *S. schwerinii*, *S. burjatica*, *S. triandra*, *S. caprea*, *S. daphnoides* and *S. ericocephala* are also used. The commercial breeding program is strongly linked to integrated research activities performed at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) through a breeding project established in 2007 (Weih et al. 2008). During recent years, quantitative trait loci (QTL) analysis has been used to study the genetic control of complex growth traits in *Salix* grown

under various environmental conditions and the QTL have been identified and mapped with significant effects on *Salix* frost resistance and phenology (Tsarouhas et al. 2004), growth, water-use efficiency and drought tolerance (Rönnberg-Wästljung et al. 2005, Weih et al. 2006). A part of this analysis is to develop genetic linkage maps, which have been made for various *Salix* species and hybrids (see Rönnberg-Wästljung et al. 2005 and references therein). The broad knowledge base on QTL for yield and resistance traits in *Populus* and the sequencing and annotation of genes in the *Populus* genome (Tuskan et al. 2006) make new approaches available for the identification of genes behind QTL in *Populus*. The close taxonomic relationship between *Populus* and *Salix* renders the *Populus* genome sequence a valuable tool also in *Salix* breeding.

#### **IV. GENERAL INFORMATION**

##### *Administration and Operation of the National Poplar Commission or equivalent Organization*

Annual meetings of the National Poplar Commission of Sweden were held in March 2005 and May 2008. The 2005 meeting was organized within the frame of a national poplar seminar held in Uppsala and the proceedings of the seminar are published by Christersson and Verwijst (2006). Apart from summaries of the various seminar contributions, this publication also includes the notes of the annual meeting, during which the board of the National Poplar Commission of Sweden was elected. Due to unclear financing and other problems, the board started its work not before the 2008 annual NPC meeting. Motivated by the increased interest in poplar and willow culture during recent years, the Swedish NPC intends to establish a webpage on current regulations and other relevant information with respect to poplar and willow culture under the Swedish conditions. In addition, a 2-day workshop on poplar and willow culture, including relevant research, is planned in autumn 2009.

##### **IVa. LITERATURE LIST ON *POPULUS* AND *SALIX* RESEARCH IN SWEDEN (2004 to early 2008)**

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## V. ANNEX 1

### *QUESTIONNAIRE ON POPLARS AND WILLOWS*

#### INTRODUCTION

The Questionnaire on Poplars and Willows is designed to complement the Country National Report.

Response to the questionnaire is crucial for FAO to allow country, regional and global analyses of status and trends in Planted Forest development and to assist in improving formulation of policies, preparing outlook studies and undertaking planning, management, monitoring and reporting.

We understand the difficulties that experts can find in providing such information however in lack of detailed statistical data, aggregated data and/or best professional estimates are also very much appreciated.

#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	13
COUNTRY NAME: .....	14
TABLE 1: TOTAL AREA OF POPLARS AND WILLOWS BY MAIN FOREST CATEGORIES, DEGREE OF MIXING WITH OTHER SPECIES AND PURPOSE (AREA CHANGE OVER THE LAST 4 YEARS) .....	14
TABLE 2(A) POPLARS: MEAN ANNUAL INCREMENT (MAI), ROTATION LENGTHS, ANNUAL REMOVALS BY SPECIES OR CLONES, FORESTRY CATEGORIES AND PURPOSE .....	16
TABLE 2(B) WILLOWS: MEAN ANNUAL INCREMENT (MAI), ROTATION LENGTHS, ANNUAL REMOVALS BY SPECIES OR CLONES, FORESTRY CATEGORIES AND PURPOSE.....	17
TABLE 2(C) MIXTURE POPLARS AND WILLOWS: MEAN ANNUAL INCREMENT (MAI), ROTATION LENGTHS, ANNUAL REMOVALS BY SPECIES OR CLONES, FORESTRY CATEGORIES AND PURPOSE .....	18
TABLE 3 MAIN CULTIVARS IN USE.....	19
TABLE 4: AREA TREND .....	19
TABLE 5A: OWNERSHIP AT YEAR 2004.....	20
TABLE 5B: OWNERSHIP AT YEAR 2007 .....	20
TABLE 6: POPLAR AND WILLOW FOREST PRODUCTS PRODUCTION.....	21
TABLE 7: AVERAGE IMPORTS OF POPLAR/WILLOW ROUNDWOOD OR WOOD CHIPS (NOT PULP, PAPER, WOOD PANELS, SAWNWOOD OR MANUFACTURED PRODUCTS).....	21
TABLE 8: AVERAGE EXPORTS OF POPLAR/WILLOW ROUNDWOOD OR WOOD CHIPS (NOT PULP, PAPER, WOOD PANELS, SAWNWOOD OR MANUFACTURED PRODUCTS).....	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	22

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COUNTRY NAME: Sweden

**Table 1: Total Area of Poplars and Willows by Main Forest Categories, Degree of Mixing with Other Species and Purpose (area change over the last 4 years)**

Table 1, is the starting point of the questionnaire. We request here to provide area of poplars and willows by the main FAO forest categories.

According to FAO forest categories Poplar and willows can be classified<sup>2</sup> as:

- **Indigenous forest:** forest of native species, where there are no clearly visible indications of human activities [...]
- **Planted forests:** forest of native species, [...] or of introduced species, established through planting or seeding mainly for *production of wood or nonwood goods* and/or *provision of services*
- **Agroforestry/Trees Outside Forests (TOF):** Stands smaller than 0.5 ha; trees in agricultural land (agroforestry systems, homegardens, orchards); trees in urban environments; and scattered along roads and in landscapes

In the following table please indicate area (ha) and purpose (%) of poplars and willows for years 2004 and 2007, and an estimate of the degree of mixture with other species (100% = pure stand). List the poplar and willow species and other relevant tree genera present (if any); e.g. *Quercus*, *Alnus*, *Betula*  
Please note that the total of the three Purpose classes (wood production, environment and other) can not be more than 100%

Poplars and Willows Forest categories		2004					2007				
		Area (000 ha)	% of presence versus other Sp. <sup>(*)</sup>	Purpose			Area (000 ha)	% of presence versus other Sp. <sup>(*)</sup>	Purpose		
				Production (%)	Protection (%)	Other (%)			Production (%)	Protection (%)	Other (%)
Indigenous	Poplars	0					0				
	Willows	0					0				
	Mix P & W	0					0				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	-----	-----	-----	-----	<b>0</b>	-----	-----	-----	-----
Planted	Poplars	0.2		99		1	0.25		99		1
	Willows	15		99		1	15		99		1
	Mix P & W	0					0				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>15.2</b>	-----	<b>--99-----</b>	-----	-----	<b>15.25</b>	-----	<b>-----99--</b>	-----	-----
Agroforestry TOF	Poplars	0					0				
	Willows	0					0				
	Mix P & W	0					0				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	-----	-----	-----	-----	<b>0</b>	-----	-----	-----	-----
<b>Overall total</b>			-----	-----	-----	-----		-----	-----	-----	-----

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/009/j9256e/j9256e00.pdf> - FAO Working Paper 37/E,F,S, Responsible management of Planted Forests: voluntary guidelines.

(\*) Please specify mixes with other relevant tree genera (if any); e.g. *Quercus*, *Alnus*, *Betula* for year 2004

Poplars

Willows

Mix P & W

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(\*) Please specify mixes with other relevant tree genera (if any); e.g. *Quercus*, *Alnus*, *Betula* for year 2007

Poplars

Willows

Mix P & W

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**Table 3 Main cultivars in use**

Please list, starting with the most common in use:

Poplars: OP42

Hybrid aspen: Ekebo

Willows: Most common is probably 'Tora', but other varieties are also planted (e.g. 'Gudrun', 'Tordis', 'Jorr', 'Loden'). No detailed statistics are available.

**Table 4: Area Trend**

**Area trend:** annual harvesting/regenerating or planting theoretically involves an area equivalent to the total production forest area divided by rotation length. Please indicate if trends are negative (more harvested than regenerated/planted), positive (more regenerated/planted than harvested) or stable: mark the appropriate boxes

Mark the selected box with "X"

Genus	Area Trends					
	Natural Forest		Planted Forest		Agroforestry/TOFs	
Poplars		Positive	X	Positive		Positive
		Negative		Negative		Negative
	X	Stable		Stable	X	Stable
Willows		Positive	X	Positive		Positive
		Negative		Negative		Negative
	X	Stable		Stable	X	Stable

## Crop Ownership

**Public ownership: crop** owned by the State (national, state and regional governments) or government-owned institutions or corporations or other public bodies including cities, municipalities and villages.

**Private ownership Corporate:** crop owned by private companies, co-operatives, corporations, industries, private religious and educational institutions, pension or investment funds (generally large scale)

**Private ownership Smallholders:** crop owned by individuals or families (generally small scale)

**Other ownership:** Crop not classified as public or private ownership that includes land where crop ownership is not defined or unknown (e.g. community, traditional).

**Table 5a: Ownership at year 2004**

According to the above classification provided list, for year 2004, the area of poplars and willows, as percentage of the total area reported in table 1, by crop ownership categories and purpose. Please note that totals by ownership categories should tally to 100%

Poplars and Willows Forest categories		2004											
		Public (%)			Private Corporate (%)			Private Smallholder (%)			Other (%)		
		Wood Prod.	Prot.	Other	Wood Prod.	Prot.	Other	Wood Prod.	Prot.	Other	Wood Prod.	Prot.	Other
Indigenous	Poplar												
	Willows												
Planted	Poplar							100					
	Willows							99	1				
Agroforestry TOF	Poplar												
	Willows												

**Table 5b: Ownership at year 2007**

According to the above classification provided list, for year 2007, the area of poplars and willows, as percentage of the total area reported in table 1, by crop ownership categories and purpose. Please note that totals by ownership categories should tally to 100%

Poplars and Willows Forest categories		2007											
		Public (%)			Private Corporate (%)			Private Smallholder (%)			Other (%)		
		Wood Prod.	Prot.	Other	Wood Prod.	Prot.	Other	Wood Prod.	Prot.	Other	Wood Prod.	Prot.	Other
Indigenous	Poplar												
	Willows												
Planted	Poplar							100					
	Willows							99	1				
Agroforestry TOF	Poplar												
	Willows												

**Table 6: Poplar and Willow Forest Products Production**

List by forest categories the roundwood equivalent for each of the stated forest products

Poplars and Willows Forest categories		Pulp, Paper, cardboard	Reconstituted wood panels	Plywood and Veneer	Sawnwood	Fuelwood & Biomass for Bioenergy	Other (specify*)	Total
Indigenous	Poplars							
	Willows							
Planted	Poplars							
	Willows							
Agroforestry TOF	Poplars							
	Willows							

\* Other Forest Products (Specify Below):

**Table 7: Average Imports of Poplar/Willow Roundwood or Wood Chips (not pulp, paper, wood panels, sawnwood or manufactured products)**

Average Imports of poplar/willow roundwood or wood chips (not pulp, paper, wood panels, sawnwood or manufactured products)

	Use either m <sup>3</sup> or tonnes (not both)		Countries of origin (in order of importance)
	m <sup>3</sup>	tonnes	
Imports			
Roundwood			
Wood chips			
Other (specify below)			

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Table 8: Average Exports of Poplar/Willow Roundwood or Wood chips (not pulp, paper, wood panels, sawnwood or manufactured products)**

Average Exports of poplar/willow roundwood or wood chips (not pulp, paper, wood panels, sawnwood or manufactured products)

	Use either m <sup>3</sup> or metric tonnes (not both)		Countries of destination (in order of importance)
	m <sup>3</sup>	tonnes	
Exports			
Roundwood			
Wood chips			
Other (specify below)			

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**For transparency in referencing please list below all documents appropriate to completion of information and data for this questionnaire**

***Bibliography*** (Your new references inputs)