

EU Forest Watch

Informing NGOs, MEPs, Member States, the European Commission and the media

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Prohibition on illegal timber is here!

New EU legislation to ban imports of illegal timber and some timber products was passed by the EU Parliament on 7 July 2010. The law - still to be rubber stamped by the EU Council - will enter into force in 2012, allowing EU countries to act in accordance with national sanctions and penalties if illegal timber is put on the EU market. A long time coming, the law is a key part of the 2003 EU FLEGT Action Programme to control illegal timber and improve forest governance.

Under the new prohibition, a “due diligence system” must be used by operators placing timber on the EU market for the first time to minimise the risk of illegal timber and timber products entering the EU market. To do this they must compile wide-ranging information concerning the timber, including the country – and indeed the concession – of harvest.

Subsequent operators in the supply chain, such as retailers, are not directly covered by the prohibition, although they must implement “risk assessment procedures” to analyse and evaluate the risk of illegal timber or timber products being placed on the market by them. This is seen as a potential loophole. Another concern raised by environmental NGOs is that, for the time being, printed products – as well as recycled products are not covered by the regulation. These two possible get-out clauses set the scene for the revision due in five years’ time.¹

Nonetheless, environmental NGOs and the tropical timber industry alike hail the rules as a great step forward in ensuring no illegal timber is sold on the EU market.

1. <http://wwf.panda.org> and <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/blog/forests/victory-after-10-years-campaigning-eu-votes-ban-illegal-timber-20100707>

More human approaches

On 23 June 2010, the Export Credit Group of the OECD held a civil society consultation as part of their review of the OECD’s environmental standards (Common Approaches).¹ For the first time, Amnesty International participated, petitioning for an explicit reference to human rights in the Common Approaches’ objectives.² UN Special Representative on Business and Human Rights John Ruggie also called for such a reference in a video presentation to the Consultation. ECA-Watch and Amnesty International are hopeful that the revised OECD ‘Common Approaches’ will make reference to human rights.

1. “Recommendations on Common Approaches on the Environment and Officially Supported Export Credits”

2. www.eca-watch.org/problems/fora/oecd/Amnesty_Intl_Submission_to_OECD_on_ECAs_26mar10.pdf

Bioenergy policy will lead to a carbon debt

At the end of June 2010, Joanneum Research presented “The Upfront Carbon Debt of Bioenergy” at the European Parliament.¹ This study of bioenergy’s carbon debt demonstrates that different sources of biomass for energy can have very different climate change mitigation potential. Additional fellings² for energy for instance, creates a “carbon debt”: carbon is emitted upfront when using trees for bioenergy whilst it takes decades for the carbon to accumulate again. As a result, the true climate impact of woody biomass in the short to medium term can be worse than the fossil fuels it intends to replace.

NGOs strongly criticise EU bioenergy policy for several reasons. It currently includes no binding criteria to ensure that the use of biomass for energy production effectively contributes to the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and does not have negative environmental or social consequences. Yet, the current climate change policy framework still regards bioenergy as carbon neutral and does not take into account GHG emissions caused by land use. This significant flaw can create perverse incentives to clear land and thereby lead to increased destruction of the world’s tropical forests

and displacement of local communities.

In May 2010, a letter signed by 90 scientists was sent to the US Congress: it petitioned for an accurate accounting scheme for GHG emissions from bioenergy in any law or regulation designed to reduce GHG emissions from energy use.³ In the US, as in the EU, this has yet to occur. Until the emissions from bioenergy are acknowledged, the carbon debt caused by current bio-energy policies will keep accumulating.

1. www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/Bioenergy_Joanneum_Research.pdf

2. An increased demand for biomass for energy production can require an increase in the amount of fellings from managed forests.

3. <http://216.250.243.12/90scientistsletter.pdf>



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United Kingdom: 1C Fosseyway Business Centre, Stratford Road, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, GL56 9NQ, UK; T +44 (0) 1608 652 895; F +44 (0) 1608 652 878. Belgium: Rue d’Edimbourg 26, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium; T +32 (0)2 894 46 90; F +32 (0)2 894 46 10.

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Photo: Jutta Kill

NEWS IN BRIEF

In September 2010, the tenth conference of the Taiga Rescue Network will take place in Rättvik, Sweden. With biodiversity and eco-services of boreal forests at stake due to industrial forestry, climate change, mining, hydrogen power, road-building and other causes; the conference will explore how to take better care of the world's boreal forest resources. Open days are organised 8 - 10 September; NGO days for TRN members only, 11 - 12 September. Register at: www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/in-english/Forest/trn-conference/.

A new report by BothENDS, "Climate Proofing European Capital Flows" (www.bothends.org), examines the policies and portfolios of Dutch, German and French Export Credit Agencies (ECAs) in developing countries, as well as those of the European Investment Bank (EIB). These portfolios, it finds, have led to a growth in greenhouse gas emissions and increased developing countries' vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Policy coherence between these public institutions and the EU is crucial: they must establish emission-reduction targets for their portfolios, include climate risk in environmental screenings, increase support for energy efficiency and renewable energy, and improve transparency and reporting standards. By financing carbon-intensive projects, the activities of Member States' ECAs clash with EU climate change objectives (FW 150).

Confused about the Voluntary Partnership Agreement process? Follow this link www.fern.org/ratification to find FERN's new two-page guide, "Process to ratify timber trade agreements." The guide explains how the system works from negotiations to initialling and ratification of an agreement.

Missing: political will to protect forests in the EU

In March 2010, the European Commission launched a green paper on forest protection to start debate about how to address the impact of climate change on forests in the EU. Council Conclusions recently adopted by Member States' environment ministers are however extremely weak. The ministers fail to acknowledge the impacts of forestry practices on biodiversity loss in the EU. Their call for strengthened cooperation and coordination in the EU regarding forest protection is insufficient to halt biodiversity loss and increase forests' resilience to climate change.

If ministers are serious about protecting forests against climate change, they should acknowledge that intensive forestry practices reduce forests' resilience against the impacts of climate change. Analysis of current forest-related policies demonstrates that forest protection has so far failed because of the lack of clear priorities and incoherence between forest protection and forestry-related policies.¹ The current Council Conclusions demonstrate that this situation is likely to remain unchanged or worsen in the face of increased intensification of forestry practises to accommodate bioenergy targets: the fundamental will to adopt necessary measures to protect forests in the EU is lacking.

1. See the upcoming FERN document, "Forests in danger. Failures of EU policy and what needs to change."

Ecolabel still endorses forest destruction

Recently a FERN report¹ charged the European Commission with providing a green seal of approval for paper products coming from Asia Pulp and Paper (APP). Now a Greenpeace report² shows that APP continues to acquire and destroy forests, including those that provide a habitat for the nearly extinct Sumatran tiger. APP also continues to clear carbon-rich peatlands to feed its Sumatran pulp mills. Greenpeace has contacted numerous companies sourcing from APP, calling upon them to stop purchasing products from APP to avoid having their brands associated with forest destruction.

Among the companies contacted,

Sweden's unsustainable forestry

Across Europe, the Swedish forestry model is viewed as an example of sustainable forest management. In reality, however, Swedish forestry has had a devastating impact on biological diversity. More than 2000 forest-dwelling species are on the world conservation union red-list of endangered species. Numerous field studies conducted by the biggest Swedish environmental NGO SSNC¹ over the past three years, reveal that hundreds of old-growth forests with high conservation values and key habitats are slated for logging or have been logged.² Although the largest forestry companies in Sweden are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified, the field studies show that a remarkable number of logged areas do not fulfil key FSC-standard criteria. After failing in its considerable efforts to strengthen the FSC Sweden Standard, SSNC resigned from FSC Sweden in mid-June 2010,³ stating that FSC-certified companies violate Swedish Forest Law and that several formal complaints had been inadequately addressed by the FSC.

1. Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

2. www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/in-english/About-us/latest-news/?news=14721

3. www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/in-english/About-us/latest-news/?news=15246

Carrefour has announced it will stop using Carrefour branded paper products produced by APP in Indonesia.³ WH Smith stated that the company does not accept any material from APP or any of its known subsidiaries.

This case shows that rather than promoting the best companies in a sector, the EU Ecolabel for wood products allows the worst companies to greenwash their practices. FERN calls upon the Commission to withdraw APP's EU Ecolabel with immediate effect and to reform the system to ensure the label is only awarded where warranted.

1. www.fern.org/pindodeli

2. <http://tiny.cc/d4wjji>

3. <http://tiny.cc/jdujkk>