

PRESS RELEASE

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EU ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PROPOSES PROHIBITION ON ILLEGAL TIMBER Campaign group welcomes draft law as a major step forwards

THE European Parliament's environment committee yesterday (Tuesday) took a major step towards stopping illegally sourced timber and wood products from being sold within the EU when it voted through new draft legislation, proposals hailed by the London-based Environmental Investigation Agency as the toughest and most meaningful yet to combat the trade and help curb rampant deforestation.

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety approved the draft proposals by 49 votes to six, including many key points re-tabled after the EU Council earlier sidelined them in favour of a substantially watered-down position.

If endorsed by the European Council in July, the legislation means EU companies would have to prove they are buying and selling only legally harvested timber and wood products, with member states having the right to investigate those suspected of breaking the law and to prosecute and impose strong penalties on the guilty.

All operators would have to provide basic information about products, their source and those they supply under a new due diligence system proposed by the European Commission.

"EIA has fought hard for the past 10 years to tackle illegal logging and the associated illegal trade in producer countries, but without strong measures from Europe the timber mafia that provides stolen timber to European importers will continue to profit from this crime," said EIA Senior Campaigner Faith Doherty.

"The environment committee, led by UK Green MEP Caroline Lucas, recognises that this issue is also the responsibility of Europe as a major consuming region of illegally sourced timber and wood products. It's up to the member states now to ensure illegal timber and wood products no longer continue to be sold as legal. They must support a prohibition and ensure strong measures come into force."

Lucas, who is also leader of the Green Party in the UK, has been the driving force behind the proposals which, in spelling out the obligations for all operators placing or making available timber and timber products on the EU market, unequivocally prohibit the sale of illegally sourced timber.

After the successful vote, she stated: "Strong support came from across the political spectrum on key issues, including adoption of an overriding prohibition on placing or making available illegally harvested timber on the EU market, extension of traceability requirements throughout the supply chain, and setting of minimum standards for penalties, including criminal sanctions."

She added: "For years, the EU has preached against illegal timber, a major driver of deforestation worldwide, but has hypocritically continued to provide one of the biggest markets for it."

The draft proposals follow the success of EIA's work in the USA which helped achieve a revision of the US Lacey Act, adopted in May 2008, to ban all sale of, and trade in, illegally harvested timber.

Interviews are available on request: please contact Faith Doherty, EIA Senior Campaigner, at faithdoherty@eia-international.org or telephone 020 7354 7960.

EDITORS' NOTES

1. The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) is a UK-based Non Governmental Organisation that investigates and campaigns against environmental crime.
2. Global deforestation is occurring at a rate of about 13 million hectares a year, is responsible for nearly 20 per cent of global carbon emissions and is a key cause of biodiversity loss. Illegal logging also causes serious human rights problems.
3. Illegal logging is a major driver of deforestation, with the volume of industrial wood from illegal sources estimated at 20-40 per cent of global industrial wood production. It depresses timber prices, strips natural resources and tax revenues, and increases poverty of forest-dependent people.
4. European illegal timber consumption generates 18.36 million tons of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) emissions per year.
5. EIA has repeatedly exposed European consumption of illegal timber; see <http://www.eia-international.org/campaigns/forests/reports/>
6. EIA's briefing *Due Negligence* highlighted the failings of the European Commission's original Due Diligence Regulation; read it at <http://www.eia-international.org/cgi/reports/reports.cgi?t=template&a=174>
7. The World Bank estimates illegal logging causes developing countries losses equivalent to US\$15 billion per annum.
8. The 2003 EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan is the European Commission's core initiative to tackle deforestation and illegal logging. The new legislation is intended to address the EU market's role in driving 12 per cent of the world's illegal logging, equivalent to €1.8 billion a year.

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