

Lacey Coalition

Important first step towards shutting down the timber barons must now be backed up with stiff penalties

THE European Parliament has today (Wednesday) voted overwhelmingly for legislation to ban illegally sourced timber and wood products from all EU territories.

London-based campaigning charity the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) has been at the forefront of efforts to curb deforestation for more than a decade and enthusiastically welcomed the new law, passed by 644 votes to 25, with 16 abstentions.

Timber importers who first place timber and wood products onto the European market are now prohibited from selling illegally harvested timber and timber products; they are also obliged to use a due diligence system to minimise the risk of doing so, a system requiring them to compile information concerning their timber, including where it was harvested.

Traders must also conduct risk assessments to evaluate the possibility of placing illegally harvested timber or timber products onto the EU market and, finally, they will have to employ risk mitigation measures to minimise the chance of acquiring illegally harvested timber and wood products. Traders selling internally within the EU must provide information on their suppliers and ensure the traceability of timber and timber products up to the first point of sale within the EU.

EIA campaigner Faith Doherty and an Indonesia colleague from local partner Telapak were kidnapped, beaten and threatened with death in January 2000 while investigating illegal logging in central Kalimantan.

She left her captors with a vow to continue fighting the timber barons and is jubilant that a further 10 years of campaigning, lobbying and undercover work have significantly contributed to the EU prohibition.

“This is a very important piece of legislation,” said Doherty. “By having this law, Europe is taking some responsibility for a huge market that has driven the demand for cheap tropical timber.

“The actual law itself could be stronger, by extending the prohibition to all players who sell timber and wood products in Europe; but for the moment, what we have is a prohibition that addresses those who first place timber and wood products onto the market.

“This is a first step and we are going to build on it. What we need to focus on now is ensuring that issues such as penalties, which are the responsibility of member states, are very strong. After all, this law is only as strong as its weakest point – but finally we have something we can use when we know illegality has occurred, which was what we wanted.”

The new EU law follows the success of EIA’s work in the USA which helped achieve a revision of the Lacey Act, adopted in May 2008, to ban all sales of, and trade in, illegally harvested timber.

For interviews, footage and imagery, 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 and charitable trust (registered charity number 1040615) that investigates and campaigns against a wide range of environmental crimes, including illegal wildlife trade, illegal logging, hazardous waste, and trade in climate and ozone-altering chemicals.

2. The legislation was steered through the EU environment committee by UK Green MEP Caroline Lucas, who has since stepped down after being elected as British MP in May.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. European illegal timber consumption drives 12 per cent of the world's illegal logging, equivalent to €1.8 billion a year, and generates 18.36 million tons of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) emissions per year.

6. EIA has repeatedly exposed European consumption of illegal timber; see <http://www.eia-international.org/campaigns/forests/reports/>

7. The World Bank estimates illegal logging causes developing countries losses equivalent to US\$15 billion per annum.

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