

# Briefing



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# Import of illegal tropical timber to the UK

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## Introduction

According to the World Resources Institute, 46.4% of the world's forests have now been lost, mostly in the last 100 years. Despite this, deforestation continues apace. A report published in January this year by the UN FAO estimated that the rate of global deforestation in 1999 was 9 million hectares. Using the FAO's own figures, the World Resources Institute estimates that in tropical countries alone the rate of deforestation was 16 million hectares when new plantations are discounted. This rate of natural forest destruction is even higher than in the 1980's.

There are a number of causes for the continued destruction of the world's forests but there is clear evidence that the timber trade is the biggest threat to biodiversity rich, old growth forest (Bad Harvest - Dudley et al - 1995). Unsustainable management practices have fuelled this destruction and illegal logging is one part of this destructive equation.

This report makes an assessment of the approximate amount of illegal tropical timber entering the UK. The nature of the illegal trade means that it is impossible to ascertain the exact percentage of illegal logs which are imported. However, by comparing the illegal level of logging in the four main supplier countries with the amount of timber coming into the UK it is possible to make an assessment of the amount of illegal tropical timber that is likely to be entering the UK. The figures on illegal logging presented come from either Government sources or highly respected research institutions /NGO's. Although this briefing examines tropical timber imports only it should be noted that there are serious levels of illegal logging in many countries in the North, especially Russia.

Less than 1% of tropical timber entering the UK comes from sources which have been independently certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Such a certificate, which provides a full chain of custody, is the only acceptable independent means of guaranteeing that the source of timber is sustainable and the best means of determining whether it is legal.

## Illegal Logging

Illegal logging takes place when timber is harvested, transported, bought or sold in violation of national laws. Types of illegal activity include illegally obtaining concessions (eg via corruption), cutting trees without permission, taking out more trees, undersized trees, oversized trees than is permitted, illegal processing or an under-declaration to customs of the amount being exported.

## Laundering Illegal Logs

By the time illegal logs reach the UK they have been laundered to cover up their origin. The laundering process can take place by such means as including illegally cut timber within a consignment of legal timber or providing false documentation at any stage of the process. When illegal timber reaches the UK it will be accompanied by some form of documentation to make it look legitimate.

## The UK Imports of Tropical Timber

The UK imports 90% of its tropical timber from only three countries - Brazil : 35%, Indonesia : 35% and Malaysia : 20%. Another 3% comes from Cameroon, with the remaining 7% coming from a number of other tropical countries. (Source : Eurostat)

## Country Case Studies and Levels of Illegal Logging

### **Brazil**

The destructive impact of the logging industry on the Brazilian Amazonian forests is legendary. Logging has made a significant contribution to the loss of 53 million hectares of forest in Brazil between 1972 and 1998, an area of forest the size of France. ( IBAMA - 1999). In 1998 deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon rose 30% on the previous year to reach 1.7 million hectares. The rate of forest destruction remained at 1.7 million hectares in 1999 (IBAMA 2000). Illegal logging in the Brazilian Amazon continues at a catastrophic level. A leaked report from the Brazilian Secretariat for Strategic Affairs in May 1997 found that 80% of logging in the Brazilian Amazon was illegal. A well respected NGO in Brazil called Imazon made an assessment in 1998 that the illegal logging level stood at 90%

Illegal logging level in Brazil - 80%

### **Indonesia**

Indonesia has now lost 72% of its original forest cover almost entirely due to the activities of the timber industry who have either cleared forest entirely or paved the way for forest conversion (Global Forest Watch). A recent World Bank study estimates that the rate of deforestation now stands at 2 million hectares / year. In the last 32 years, during the rule of Soeharto, Indonesia lost 40 million hectares of forest, equivalent to the combined size of Germany and the Netherlands. A recent study in 2000 by the Indonesia-UK Tropical Forest Management Programme, concluded that 73% of Indonesia's logging was illegal.

Illegal logging level in Indonesia - 73%

### **Malaysia**

Malaysia has now lost approximately half of its forests. In Sarawak there have been some major conflicts between the authorities and indigenous groups regarding destructive logging practices and the conversion of forests to acacia and palm oil plantations on indigenous land. Sarawak has been identified as a significant point of entry for illegal logs from Indonesia. One investigation by Tanjungpura University in Pontianak in 2000 found that 50-60 trucks loaded with illegal logs were entering Sarawak (Malaysia) from Kalimantan (Indonesia) every day. The level of illegal logging has increased since the economic crisis of 1997. The most recent assessment of the level of illegal timber being exported from Malaysia suggests that it is 35% of total exports ( WWF). It is likely that most of this total is derived from logs smuggled over the border from Indonesia.

Illegal logging level in Malaysia - 35%

### **Cameroon**

Half of Cameroon's forests have already been lost. Cameroon is now among the worlds top 5 tropical log exporters. 81% of Cameroon's unprotected forest has now been allocated to logging and only twenty-five logging companies and individuals hold three quarters of Cameroon's forest concessions. 96% of violations reported in 1992-93 were followed by incomplete judicial procedures and one out of five violation reports was dropped after the intervention of an influential person. Since the reform of the forestry sector in 1994 illegal logging has escalated. More than 50% of logging licenses were

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operating illegally in 1997-1998 (Global Forest Watch). Le Centre pour L'environnement et le Developpement in Cameroon has stated in their journal 'Inside Cameroon' that at least 50% of logging is illegal.

Illegal logging level in Cameroon - 50%

## The Illegal Import of Tropical Timber into UK

### Level of illegal logging

Brazil	80%	(Brazilian Secretariat for Strategic Affairs - 1997)
Indonesia	73%	(Indonesia-UK Tropical Forest Management Programme - 2000 - "Roundwood Supply & Demand in the Forest Sector in Indonesia)
Malaysia	35%	(WWF - 1995 - Bad Harvest)
Cameroon	50%	(World Resources Institute - An Overview of Logging in Cameroon - 2000 / Le Centre pour L'environnement et le Developpement)

### Sources of the UK's tropical timber imports in 1999

(Eurostat data - converted to round wood equivalent volume and then rounded)

Brazil	35%	- 700,000 cubic metres
Indonesia	35%	- 700,000 cubic metres
Malaysia	20%	- 400,000 cubic metres
Cameroon	3%	- 60,000 cubic metres
Other	7%	- 140,000 cubic metres
Total :	100%	- 2 million cubic metres

### Potential import of illegal tropical timber into UK

Brazil - 80% of 700,000 cubic metres = 560,000 cubic metres = 28% of total UK tropical timber imports.

Indonesia - 73% of 700,000 cubic metres = 510,000 cubic metres = 25% of total UK tropical timber imports.

Malaysia - 35% of 400,000 cubic metres = 140,000 cubic metres = 7% of total UK tropical timber imports.

Cameroon - 50% of 60,000 cubic metres = 30,000 cubic metres = 2% of total UK tropical timber imports.

## Conclusion

Total potential illegal tropical timber import into UK from four main suppliers is 1.2 million cubic metres (rwe). This volume of timber represents 62% of the UK's tropical timber imports. Friends of the Earth therefore estimates that somewhere between half and two-thirds of the UK's tropical timber imports may come from illegal sources.

Assuming that the rate of log production per unit of forest area in the tropical forests of these countries is roughly one third of that from the UK's forests, then this is equivalent to illegally logging in the order of one million hectares of natural forest per year - approximately half the size of the UK's forests. This implies that, during the last ten years, an area of tropical forest five times the size of the UK's forests may have been damaged or destroyed illegally to feed the UK tropical timber market.

It must also be recognised that of the remaining 38% of tropical timber imports that may be legal, apart from FSC. imports which account for less than 1% of total imports, there is no independent guarantee that they are from sustainable sources. This means that more than 99% of tropical timber imports into the UK may be from illegal and unsustainable sources.

## Recommendations

### Consumers

Consumers should only buy timber products if they are either recycled or have an FSC. logo. An FSC. logo demonstrates that the product has been certified to the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council, the only independent and credible chain of custody scheme which guarantees that timber has come from well managed forests.

### Timber industry

The timber industry must move towards the objective of only buying and selling timber products which have been certified by the FSC.

### Government

Friends of the Earth is calling on the UK Government to take the following legislative action to tackle the flow of illegal timber into the UK.

1. Make it illegal to import and sell illegally sourced timber in the UK. The UK Government must take a lead in ensuring this law is also adopted at the European level and by all G8 member countries.
2. Make the UK's Green Claims Code legally binding. Presently this voluntary initiative allows companies to make claims of legality and sustainability that cannot be substantiated.