



Tropical Rainforest and
Illegal Logging

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The international trade in illegally logged timber is a major global problem that:

- causes environmental damage
- promotes corruption
- costs governments billions of dollars in lost revenue.

Australian wood imports from suspicious origins

Most Australian timber and wood product imports with suspicious origins are hardwoods derived from tropical rainforests in neighbouring developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Rainforest timbers are attractive and durable. They are generally imported as direct substitutes for hardwoods from Australian native forests. As Australian native forests have been progressively removed from production in favour of more conservation reserves, imports of tropical hardwoods have increased.

A recent study conducted on behalf of the Australian Government identified wooden furniture and miscellaneous forest products as the major imports with suspicious origins within developing countries in the tropics.

Miscellaneous forest products include doors, mouldings, parquet, engineered flooring panels, carpenter's pieces and cork and cooperage for the wine industry.

Imports of tropical sawn timber increased by 47 per cent between 2001 and 2004. During the same period, the Western Australian Government reduced the annual harvest of similarly decorative and durable sawn timber from its jarrah and karri forests by 62 per cent.

Overall, at least 232,000m³ of imported wood products (or nine per cent of import value) are regarded as being of suspicious origin. In terms of round log equivalent, it approximates the combined Victorian and Tasmanian native hardwood sawlog harvest.

Curbing illegal logging

Trying to curb the importation of timber and wood products from suspicious sources is complicated because there are two clear routes into Australia:

- directly from the source country
- shipped from the source country to another country for further processing before being imported into Australia.

Identifying suspect timber is more difficult when it follows the latter route. For example, up to 70 per cent of Malaysian hardwood log imports have a high probability of being from illegal logging in Indonesia. Malaysia exports significant quantities of sawn timber and manufactured wood products to Australia.

There are several approaches to reducing illegal logging in developing countries.

Forest certification and product labelling:

Under this approach, timber producers are certified by an independent process that ensures their products come from sustainably managed forests. Timber and wood products are then labelled to show consumers that they are purchasing legally obtained timber derived from good forestry practices. The first international certification system was developed by the Forest Stewardship Council in the early 1990's. Since then, a range of alternate systems has been developed to provide the same certainty to the consumer. Although the area of certified forest has grown steadily to 280 million hectares, this currently represents just 6-7 per cent of the world's forests.

Increase collaboration with neighbouring developing countries:

The Australian Government's draft policy on illegal logging commits it to work with developing countries to improve their forest management practices and develop legal assurances and related processes for their forest products. The government committed \$200 million to assist this process in early 2007.

Foster and develop the domestic Australian timber industry:

The Australian Government has identified this as a key component in the battle to reduce imports of illegally sourced timber and wood products. It is encouraging the expansion of the plantation sector and value adding to the native forest sector to fill the areas of demand currently being met by imports.

Federal Government support for the native forest timber industry is an important development given that domestic demand for hardwood is expected to remain at current levels or even to increase. Using Australian native hardwood timbers is one of the best things that we can do to reduce imports of illegally logged produce which is contributing to tropical deforestation.

For further information, contact
the VicForests Corporate Support Office:
Telephone: **03 9608 9500**
Email: **vfs.admin@vicforests.com.au**
Visit VicForests on-line at **www.vicforests.com.au**

