Ireland's failure to implement the EU Timber Regulation undermines efforts to cut illegal logging

1 Background

The EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) seeks to address the serious environmental, economic and social consequences of illegal logging by preventing illegal timber from accessing the EU market, improving the supply of legal timber and increasing demand for wood from responsibly managed forests.

The EUTR entered into force on 3rd March 2013. It makes it illegal to place illegally logged timber on the EU market and includes timber products such as pulp and paper, furniture and plywood. For the first time, it places the onus on traders to ensure the timber they sell has been legally logged. Those wishing to sell in EU markets must know key information about the timber, including the country of harvest and its logging laws.

2 Irish Timber Consumption

Ireland, even despite the economic downturn, continues to consume a huge amount of timber and timber products. In 2011, €510,000,000 worth was imported, including 201,000 cubic meters of sawn timber and over 437,000 cubic meters of pulp and paper. From musical instruments to wood in construction, Irish producers and consumers are at significant risk of buying illegal timber.

3 Lack of Implementation in Ireland

Ireland is responsible for ensuring the EUTR is enforced and levying "effective, proportionate and dissuasive" penalties for law breakers. The Government had over two years to put in place appropriate measures, including a body (known as a Competent Authority) to ensure effective implementation. It was required to notify the Commission by 3 June 2011 of the name and address of the relevant Competent Authority. Minister Coveney has thus far failed to do this.

Having failed in this, and to implement or apply the law, Ireland broke its obligation to enforce the EUTR. This means illegal timber can continue to be placed on the Irish market without scrutiny. Continued non-compliance in Ireland and other EU countries could lead to a distortion in the EU timber market, undermining efforts of legitimate business to comply with the law.

The Irish government is breaking its legal obligations under the EU Treaties and disregarding its moral obligation to address illegal logging. This is all the more unacceptable given that Ireland is currently President of the EU Council of Ministers.

Key Facts

Illegal logging

Illegal logging is estimated to account for 15-30% of the global timber trade and 50-90% of the volume of all timber production in key countries in the Amazon Basin, Central and West Africa and South East Asia. The value of illegal logging is estimated to be between US$ 30 and 100 Billion.[1]

The trade of illegal timber is estimated to decrease the price of legally harvested timber by 7-16%. It also results in lost revenues from taxes and other duties that could be used by producer countries to improve the welfare of their citizens through health and educational programmes.

In environmental terms, illegal logging is associated with deforestation, water pollution, spread of disease, climate change and a loss of biodiversity. In social terms, illegal logging is linked with conflicts over land tenure and resources, the disempowerment of communities, the loss of lives and livelihoods, human rights violations, corruption and armed conflict.

EUTR

By developing the EUTR, the EU has created a regulatory approach that seeks to limit the trade of illegally harvested timber and support legal forest practices.

The EU is not alone in this – the US already has similar legislation (the Lacey Act) and Australia has recently passed a similar law (Australian Illegal Logging Prohibition Act 2012).

The EUTR is designed to work in tandem with anti-illegal logging trade and governance initiatives in the EU and timber producing countries.

For the law to work in practice, it will need the active participation of industry, government and civil society stakeholders.

ENDS

Contact

To speak to our EUTR experts, please contact Rose Orlik, ClientEarth communications officer: +44 (0) 203 030 5954 or rorlik@clientearth.org

[1] Interpol and UNEP, *Green Carbon-Black Trade, Illegal logging, Tax Fraud and Laundering in the World's Tropical Forests* available at http://www.grida.no/publications/rr/green-carbon-black-trade/