

Out on a limb



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Concern about illegal logging and unsustainable forest practices, especially in the tropics, led the UK government to pledge to take action domestically to help combat illegal logging at a G8 summit in 2000. The UK is the 4th biggest importer of timber products in the world and of the timber products on the UK market an estimated 15% is consumed on the government estate. The international commitment to exclude illegal timber from government purchases led to the development of a timber procurement policy.

Over the past decade, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) with support from colleagues across government, has been implementing a range of measures to tackle the issues related to illegal logging through procurement. The timber procurement policy feeds into general national strategies for sustainable consumption and production and more recently also climate change mitigation. Reports show that deforestation, which is often linked to illegal logging, contributes up to a fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions.

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In governments across Europe awareness of issues such as illegal logging, tropical deforestation and sustainable forest management are more prominent than ever. High level UN discussions about the role of forests in climate change mitigation and continuing progress on the EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan have placed forestry issues firmly on the political agenda. The UK government's timber procurement policy has progressed significantly over the past ten years. The policy is now recognised across Europe for its effectiveness in implementation and progressive facilitation of changes in forestry standards.

The UK TPP

The UK government's timber procurement policy is seen as an important step in helping to tackle problems at the forest source and to motivate changes in practice and management by creating a demand for legal and sustainable timber products. When the timber procurement policy was first announced in 2000 it committed central government "to actively seek to procure only legal timber and preferably sustainable timber".

In April 2009, the policy developed a significant step further and now requires government buyers to demand either legal **and** sustainable timber, or timber licensed under a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between the EU and a supplier country. VPAs are an important element of the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) initiative.

Legality and sustainability are defined by a set of criteria which are derived from internationally agreed criteria for legal and sustainable forest management including ITTO's criteria and indicators. In order to demonstrate that timber is from a legal and sustainable source, and thereby in compliance with the policy, suppliers are required to prove the traceability of the timber (chain of custody) and to prove that the forest source was managed legally and sustainably as defined by the UK government's legality and sustainability criteria, or FLEGT licensed. Therefore, evidence related to both management of the forest and the chain of custody is required.

Early this year further steps in policy development were taken when the UK government announced that the timber procurement policy would now include specific social criteria. The social requirements clarify that the management of the forest must have full regard for the interests of indigenous peoples, local communities and forest workers. The requirements specifically refer to tenure and use rights, means of resolving grievances and disputes, and safeguarding the basic labour and health and safety rights of forest workers.

The policy is a mandatory requirement for central government departments, executive agencies and non departmental public bodies.

Other publically funded bodies, such as universities and local authorities are encouraged to voluntarily adopt the policy. The requirements apply to all timber and wood-derived products, such as paper, furniture and construction timber, including temporary site works and material supplied by contractors.

Evidence required to demonstrate compliance

Two types of evidence are recognised by the UK government as demonstrating timber originating from a legal and sustainable source: Category A and Category B evidence. Category A evidence is independent certification under a scheme recognized as meeting the legality and sustainability criteria set by the UK government. The international certification schemes implemented by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) have been found to meet these criteria and thereby ensure compliance with the policy. Category B evidence, is all other forms of credible evidence and is assessed on a case by case basis.

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CPET's role

A scoping study of the policy, undertaken in 2002, concluded that technical expertise in assessing evidence of compliance and additional support and guidance would be needed for the policy to be implemented successfully. The study recommended the establishment of a Central Point of Expertise on Timber (CPET) to provide government procurement personnel with information and advice to support the implementation of the policy. After a pilot phase, CPET was launched by Defra in 2005 and since then has provided active support to government in terms of ensuring policy implementation. CPET now provides a range of guidance and advisory services, at no cost to government buyers or suppliers, including a helpline, website, training sessions, direct support and awareness raising to help government departments, the public sector and their suppliers and contractors to implement the policy.

The timber procurement advice note from Defra and CPET makes it clear to public buyers that, where no verified legal and sustainable or FLEGT-licensed or equivalent source is available, evidence that the source of the timber was legally managed will be accepted. However, documented justification setting out why no alternative product or timber species can be used and confirmation of no sustainable or FLEGT licensed timber being available has to be presented. Instructions also clarify that preference for timber from sources that are demonstrably in an active programme to improve and certify forest management should be preferred.

To give suppliers more flexibility in finding well-managed forests for their sources of timber, the advice note and CPET also instruct public buyers to specify requirements in performance output terms rather than demanding particular species, unless unavoidable. Where it is not feasible to specify the requirements in performance output terms, then those responsible for writing the technical specifications are instructed to consider lesser-known species/timbers in addition to more well-known species/timber.

CPET training sessions take public buyers, suppliers and contractors through what legal and sustainable forest management is and what is required to prove it. This enables public buyers to understand what the potential premiums for legal and sustainable tropical timber reflect and to know that they are paying the 'right price' for the timber. This helps to create an incentive for ensuring legal and sustainable forest management.

One of the most important roles of CPET is to provide technical support to public buyers and suppliers with assessments of evidence of compliance. CPET enables expert-based risk assessment of evidence provided to demonstrate compliance with the policy. CPET also plays an important role in ensuring consistency across the public sector in application of the policy.

Looking forward

Consistency in requirements is important to avoid confusion. At the EU level, Defra and CPET share experiences with other member states. In October 2008, as part of the European

Commission's Standing Forestry Committee, an ad hoc working group on public procurement of wood was established. The aim of the working group is to provide a forum for exchange of experiences between the member states, European Commission services and other stakeholders to develop guidelines for application of the public procurement directives to forest products. This exchange of views should serve to achieve better compatibility between different approaches applied in the member states, and also support the EU FLEGT Action Plan.

The UK government timber procurement policy is seen as a major driver in creating a demand for sustainable and legal timber products across the UK. In the last three years, there has been a marked increase in certified timber imported or produced in the UK, rising from 65% in 2005 to nearly 85% in 2009. The proportion of timber certified from tropical countries is, however, still below 20% of the total tropical timber imported into the UK.

The UK government's timber procurement policy has now reached maturity and the emphasis now focuses on ensuring that the policy is implemented consistently across government, and that private and public sector suppliers and contractors are provided with support and advice to help them understand the requirements.

More information on the UK TPP is available on the CPET website (www.cpet.org.uk). CPET welcomes input and comments through the website or by email (cpet@proforest.net).

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the Congolese Forest Network for such work, then we can use it for many already scheduled activities related to environment protection and climate change fighting. Otherwise, we will continue to work in our own capacity, but with a feeble impact, due to the small scale of our activities.

Overall, the lack of the funding for most NGOs acting in the forest and environment sector in the DRC leads to ongoing deforestation and degradation that impacts climate change. It is time for the nations to wake up and act to fight climate change through associations such as the Congolese Foresters Network and mobilize their human and financial resources in order to take up these global challenges.

How will you use the knowledge you gain while at the WFI?

My goal is to learn how people manage the forests here, so that I can take those practices back to the DRC. I wish to contribute to the preservation of Congolese forests through the use of modern forest-management techniques. The goal of the Congolese Forest Network is to get community participation to constitute 80 percent of forest management. We are intensifying reforestation efforts, reviewing the laws concerning conservation, and promoting an attitude of respect towards forests. Through this [WFI] platform I can have an exchange about the challenges of our country. I can give the other [stakeholders] a briefing on the management practices I learned here, and I can also organize workshops where I can invite local communities and other organizations, such as local and international NGOs, to have a dialog about the management of our natural resources. I want to get the Congolese people to care about their forests and show them how to sustainably manage them.