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## **Trade data come in (slowly)**

The Secretariat's Steven Johnson presented 'Elements of the Annual Review and Assessment of the World Timber Situation 2003' at the 35th Session of the International Tropical Timber Council held in Yokohama last November (see page 16 for an account of the session). He reported that the total value of consumer imports of all tropical timber products would continue the trend of recent years and remain stable or increase slightly in 2003. The two components of this total trade value continued to converge, with the value of secondary processed wood products (SPWPs) in consumer imports increasing while the value of primary products remained stable. He also noted that the overall role of natural tropical forests in the supply of timber products was declining: natural forests accounted for 80% of the wood in all timber products in 1991 but only about 40% in 2003, as most SPWPs and a growing proportion of primary products are based on plantation wood. Nevertheless, natural tropical forests were still the major suppliers of wood raw materials in many producer countries. Dr Johnson noted the continuing poor performance of many member countries in the provision of data on timber production and trade, although Bolivia, Ghana, Honduras, Togo and Suriname all provided good-quality information. The 2003 *Annual Review* will be finalised and published (in English, French and Spanish) in the first half of 2004; write to [itto-stats@itto.or.jp](mailto:itto-stats@itto.or.jp) to pre-order a copy.

## **Purchasing guidelines**

The Danish Environmental Protection Agency in the Ministry of the Environment has released environmental guidelines for the purchase of tropical timber. Recently translated into English from the original Danish, these guidelines aim to "make it easier for public and semi-public institutions to ensure that the tropical timber they purchase is produced in a legal and sustainable manner".

According to the guidelines, most tropical timber "has good natural durability, making it suited for and environmentally friendly in the outdoor environment, without impregnation with preservatives, etc. In addition, a lot of tropical timber has a number of aesthetic qualities and great strength". It makes reference to less well-known wood types "that are easier to obtain [than some popular species] from legal and sustainable forest management [and] are often equally well suited [to the same uses]. ... Purchasers can therefore help protect forests by requesting wood with particular technical properties and appearance, instead of just asking for wood from one or a few particular species."

To ensure legality, the guidelines recommend that buyers make the following stipulations (as a minimum): that the producer has had the necessary rights and permits to carry out logging of the given tree species, grades and dimensions; that the producer has fulfilled all relevant national legislation regarding forest management and the effects of forest management on people and the

environment; that any due taxes and duties have been paid; and that all statutory declarations and permits from the authorities have been obtained. The guidelines also make recommendations for ensuring the sustainability of forest management.

*The publication 'Purchasing tropical timber: environmental guidelines' (English version) can be downloaded at [www.frontlinien.dk/ukindex.asp](http://www.frontlinien.dk/ukindex.asp)*

## **Don't worry about short-term impacts**

Writing in *Biodiversity and Conservation* (12: 1445–1453, 2003), Fredericksen and Putz suggest that forest management prescriptions that insist on the minimisation of disturbance and canopy gaps—the "gap-phase regeneration" paradigm—"is disturbing in the light of accumulating evidence for the importance of cataclysmic natural and anthropogenic disturbances in many tropical forests". They say that regardless of how logging is conducted, its primary impacts are minor compared to secondary impacts such as the increased access to the forest by colonists and poachers and the increased vulnerability of many forests to fire. Moreover, many high-value species, including *Swietenia macrophylla* (mahogany), *Cedrela* species and *Shorea leprosula* (light red meranti) require higher levels of disturbance than are typically created under minimal impact regimes and when logging intensities are low. The authors suggest that conservationists should focus less on the short-term impacts of logging and more on managing commercially productive forests that are protected from wildfires, poaching and conversion. Such managed forests "will still retain a large proportion of their pre-harvest biodiversity, much more than would be retained if they were to be converted to cattle pastures, agricultural fields, or pulpwood plantations".

## **Forest fiscal discussion**

The World Bank's Program on Forests (PROFOR) convened an International Workshop on Reform of Forest Fiscal Systems on 19–21 October 2003 in Washington, DC, USA. The workshop was intended to provide a forum for frank discussion on the political economy of forest fiscal reforms. Participants from seven countries—Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia and Nicaragua—in government and the private sector shared their experiences. Beyond considering forest fiscal systems for efficient revenue collection and maximisation, the workshop looked at forest fiscal instruments as tools to promote sustainable forest management and broader societal goals including poverty reduction, gender equality and good governance.

*A summary of the workshop can be downloaded at [www.profor.info/pdf/FFSbriefingnote.pdf](http://www.profor.info/pdf/FFSbriefingnote.pdf), or contact Laura Ivers, Communications Officer, PROFOR, 1818 H Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20433 USA; Tel 1-202-473 2396; Fax 1-202-522 1142; [laivers@worldbank.org](mailto:laivers@worldbank.org)*