

ITTO Tropical Forest

UPDATE

A newsletter from the International Tropical Timber Organization to promote the conservation and sustainable development of tropical forests



Life after 50

The International Tropical Timber Council is turning 50—that is, it is about to convene in its 50th session.¹ The Council is ITTO's governing body, and it has achieved much since its first session in Geneva in 1985/86. This special edition of the *TFU* features interviews with nine Council chairs, from the early days of the Council through to the present, as well as with the chairs of the Trade Advisory Group (TAG), the Civil Society Advisory

Group (CSAG) and a representative of the host city, Yokohama. We ask interviewees about the challenges the Council has faced over the years, its achievements, its strengths and weaknesses, and what its role might be in the future.

Inside: Interviews with Council chairs and others; Fellowship stories...

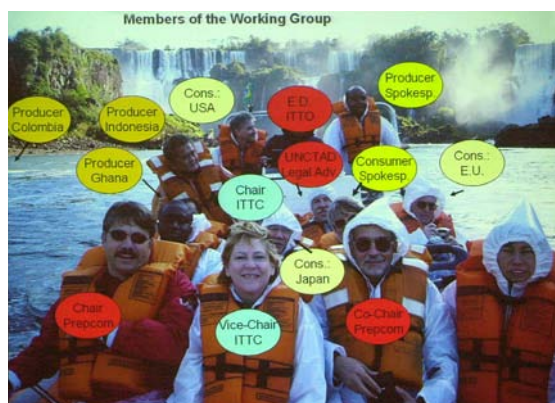


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Printing/distribution Print Provider Aps (Denmark)

The *Tropical Forest Update* is published quarterly in English, French and Spanish by the International Tropical Timber Organization. Content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of ITTO. Articles may be reprinted without charge provided the *TFU* and author are credited. The editor should be sent a copy of the publication.

Printed on METAPAPER SILK RECYCLING, FSC-certified (mixed-sources), 100% recycled and CO2 compensated paper stock. Printed using vegetable-based soya inks. All METAPAPER papers are produced with an average of 74.66% of renewable energies.

The *TFU* is distributed **free of charge** to over 15 000 individuals and organizations in more than 160 countries. To receive it, send your full address to the editor. Please notify us if you change address. The *TFU* is also available on-line at www.itto.int.

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Images: Cover: Delegates and office-bearers at the 45th session of the International Tropical Timber Council, held in Yokohama in November 2009. *Photo: K. Sato*; Above: Members of a 2003 intersessional working group on the negotiation of a successor agreement to the International Tropical Timber Agreement 1994 enjoy a wild ride. *Photo and captions courtesy J. Blaser and the Earth Negotiations Bulletin*

Markku Simula (p. 3) was the fifth chair of the Council (in 1990). He recalls that in the early days there was a sense of “building something new, something that had never been tried”, although there was also “resistance about how far the Organization should go”.

Ambassador Koichi Suzuki (p. 6) chaired the Council in 1994. He says that the major achievement during his time in office was reaching agreement on the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) 1994, which was negotiated to replace the ITTA 1983 (and subsequently replaced by another agreement, the ITTA 2006).

Stephanie Caswell (p. 7), who chaired the Council in 1998, says that the adoption of ITTO’s first comprehensive set of criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests (C&I) was perhaps the Council’s most significant accomplishment during her tenure. The Organization’s leadership in C&I “has had a very real impact on the management of tropical forests”.

Josefina Takahashi (p. 10) chaired the Council in 2001. She cites a decision on forest law enforcement in the context of sustainable timber production and trade as one of the important Council decisions made during her term because “it cleared the way for a more open and constructive dialogue on this issue in other forums as well”. Alhassan Attah (p. 12), who chaired the Council in 2005, says that the Council’s work on phased approaches to certification was one of the successes of his term because it gave members “an opportunity to discuss legality as a first step in the certification process”. José Trinidad Suazo (p. 24) agrees that ITTO’s policy development work has been helpful for tropical countries, in particular on issues such as timber tracking, the promotion of efficient wood-processing technologies, and cooperation between ITTO and other international organizations.

Katharina Kühmayer (p. 15) was the first Council chair (in 2008) to preside over the new regime in which only one Council session is held per year. Her focus, therefore, was on procedural matters. This was also the case for Ambassador Michael

Maue (p. 17), who chaired the Council in 2009.

Barney Chan (p. 19), the chair of TAG, says that the Council has had “too many achievements” to name them all, although he singles out the C&I. On the other hand, he thinks the Council has been too cautious on a number of key issues and risks “being pushed aside by others”. Chen Hin Keong (p. 20), co-chair of CSAG, says that the formation of CSAG has been critical because it provides the Council with a voice from civil society, although he also thinks the Council needs to take a stronger lead on certain issues. Makoto Sekiyama (p. 22) thinks that the convening of Council sessions in Yokohama has boosted the city’s international profile and that hosting the headquarters has been beneficial for both ITTO and the city.

Rob Busink (p. 25) is the Council’s current chair. He says that ITTO is a unique organization—the ITTA is the only legally binding agreement on forests at the global level and, although focused on tropical timber, it has a broad scope, encompassing all aspects of sustainable forest management (SFM). Forthcoming discussions on the international arrangement on forests are an opportunity, he says, for ITTO to make more widely known what it can do to help solve international problems.

The Council has considerable strengths that can be built on, and some weaknesses that can be overcome. In the course of its 50 sessions, the Council has made an incalculably valuable contribution to global efforts to promote SFM, sustainable forest industries and a sustainable tropical timber trade, and it has helped build capacity (especially through its Fellowship Programme, p. 27). The eminent people interviewed in this edition of the *TFU* have many good ideas on how to add even more value to the Council. Let the Council’s work continue.

1 The 50th session of the Council will be convened in Yokohama, Japan, in November 2014. This edition of the *TFU* was published on the eve of the Council session, so by the time most readers receive their copies, the session will have been held. See the ITTO website (www.itto.int) for the outcomes of the session.