

Council adds to its program on tropical forests

The International Tropical Timber Council pledged a further US\$6 million for new projects and activities

A PROJECT to evaluate the commercial stocks of mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) in Peru and to formulate a strategy for the sustainable management of the species will be undertaken after benefiting from part of the US\$6 million pledged by the International Tropical Timber Council at its 36th session last July.

The Council, ITTO's governing body, financed ten projects at the session, including one that will support collaborative forest management in Surigao del Sur in the Philippines, another that will bring greater transparency to tropical timber trade flows in China, and another that will strengthen capacity in Indonesia to utilise efficient wood-processing technologies. See page 18 for more information on the projects and pre-projects financed.

The Council session was notable for the parallel convening of a workshop comprising representatives of the tropical timber trade and civil society (see below). This workshop presented a report to Council in which it urged ITTO and its member states to take aggressive steps towards combating illegal logging and illegal timber trade, and made a number of specific recommendations.

The major donors at the session were the governments of Japan, Switzerland and the United States, and contributions were also pledged by the governments of Norway, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand and by the Common Fund for Commodities. In addition, funds were mobilised from the Unearmarked Fund of the Organization's Special Account and from its Bali Partnership Fund Sub-account B.

Trade, civil-society organisations agree on measures to combat illegal logging

An unusual gathering of the tropical timber trade and civil society has urged ITTO and its member states to take aggressive steps towards combating illegal logging and illegal timber trade.

The Workshop on Illegal Logging and Illegal Trade, held over two days in conjunction with the 36th session of the Council, was attended by seven representatives of the



Point taken: Delegates chat during a break in proceedings at the 36th session of the International Tropical Timber Council. Photo: *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*

tropical timber trade under the banner of the Council's Trade Advisory Group (TAG), and eight representatives of civil-society organisations within the Council's Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG).

In a report issued by workshop participants to the Council, the TAG and CSAG agreed that illegal logging and illegal trade were major concerns.

"This problem has serious social and environmental impacts, undermines honest industry, discourages investment in responsible forest management, and diminishes forestry's contribution to social and economic development."

"For this reason, both TAG and CSAG were very pleased that the [Council] formally recognised the problem in 2001 and has begun to take steps to address it."

However, the two groups agreed that ITTO and its member states could do much more to combat illegal logging and illegal timber trade.

For example, it recommended that additional support be given to ITTO's existing initiatives on trade statistics' discrepancies, and that country-level projects be encouraged to promote transparency in the tropical timber trade and access to information.

According to co-chair Dr Andy White, of the non-governmental organisation Forest Trends, full transparency and easy access to all forest trade data are crucial if illegal trade is to be eliminated.

"Transparency is a first step," he said. "We're not going anywhere without at least trying to get good data."

The workshop also recommended three actions that ITTO could take in the short term. These were:

- conduct an international conference on the transportation of timber products, involving representatives of financial institutions, customs, shipping, and transport sectors, with the view of identifying weaknesses which have allowed for illegal trade;
- conduct an international conference on indigenous and other community forestry, forest tenure, policy and other regulatory barriers to management and trade, and their relationships to illegal logging and illegal trade; and
- strengthen and expand the ITTO project window to finance private-sector/civil-society partnerships to

advance sustainable and legal forest management and trade.

The Council subsequently made about US\$440 000 available to implement these three recommendations.

According to Dr White's co-chair, Mr Barney Chan of the Sarawak Timber Association, the greater understanding of the transport sector that would arise from the first of these short-term recommendations would be particularly useful.

"This is a link in the chain that has not really been scrutinised in the context of forest law enforcement, and if we can study it now in detail we might gain some very useful insights," he said.

Dr White was supportive of the concept of the joint CSAG/TAG workshop, but cautioned that members of both groups would be taking a great interest in the extent to which Council addressed the recommendations.

"Success will be measured on action by the Council," he said. "The people who participated [in the workshop] on both sides appreciated the opportunity to engage on this issue but are wary about not being taken seriously. There is a strong appetite in both groups for action."

The Council's Chair, Ms Jan McAlpine, expressed her pleasure at the outcomes of the workshop.

"This has been an historic event," she said. "That two groups with often contrasting views could sit down and jointly propose such strong and substantial actions is a credit to them. It is also a credit to the Council to move so quickly to implement the most immediate of the recommendations."

Ms McAlpine said that the workshop could lead to more rapid action to combat illegal forest and timber-trade activities.

"Sometimes it takes civil society and trade to lead governments in contentious areas," she said.

"By tackling these often divisive issues head-on and agreeing on a common agenda for action by ITTO, the workshop could potentially greatly assist governments to increase cooperation in this area."

The full text of the CSAG/TAG statement is published on page 32. For more information on CSAG contact: Dr Andy White, awhite@forest-trends.org. For more information on TAG contact: Mr Barney Chan, belachan@aol.com

See the IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin coverage of the session at <http://www.iisd.ca/forestry/itto/ittc36/>

Promote trade in sustainably produced timber, says Council chair

Positive support from importing countries and consumers of forest products from sustainably managed tropical forests can improve the sustainable management of those critical forests and help reduce deforestation, according to an ITTO official.

"Negative campaigns targeting tropical timber may instead undermine long-term sustainability and not achieve their intended objectives," said Ms Jan McAlpine, the current chair of the International Tropical Timber Council.

"We are very concerned about the loss of natural tropical forests, the poverty of many people living in or near such forests and the threat of extinction of the wildlife in them," she said.

"It is important for people who use tropical timber products to understand that restrictions on tropical timber trade actually discourage efforts to promote sustainable forest management. Unless natural forests are able to generate significant revenue for their owners and residents, they will be replaced by other land-uses, such as the cultivation of soybeans, oil palm and other crops."

A better approach, said Ms McAlpine, is to encourage sustainable forest management through a variety of incentives, including market incentives.

Among the measures available to the private sector are voluntary codes of conduct for industry, providing new technologies—such as GIS and satellite remote sensing—for use by tropical forest governments, the certification of sustainably managed forests, and the ecolabelling of products so that consumers who purchase those products can be reassured that they are derived from sustainably managed forests.

"However, many tropical timber countries lack the capacity to immediately implement sustainable forest management in natural tropical forests to enable them to certify their forests," said Ms McAlpine.

During the session the Council heard a report on a way to give countries credit for their efforts to achieve sustainable forest management—a 'phased approach' to certification, in which the first step is the assurance that the timber was legally acquired and produced.

"ITTO was one of the first international organisations to address the important issue of illegally harvested timber and has several projects addressing this issue," said Ms McAlpine.

ITTO has also embarked on a major study of export-import data discrepancies with the voluntary cooperation of six producing countries and four consuming countries representing some of the most extensive tropical forests on the globe. The Council also received a report on progress on this study during the session.

"This and other work being undertaken by the Organization, including its project work, will help those producers who wish to obtain certification to acquire some of the basics needed to get it—and so hopefully help them to increase their market share in importing countries," said Ms McAlpine.

"It is important that markets remain open to tropical timber in the meantime," she added.

"Otherwise, countries have no incentive to protect these forests or to manage them sustainably. Ultimately, that will be bad for forests and the people and wildlife who live in them, and disastrous for all of us."