Closing the EU market to illegal timber

Some 1.6 billion people – more than 20% of the global population – depend on forests for food and livelihoods.

Forests regulate water supplies and climate, are the source of many medicines, and help prevent floods and droughts.

The EU Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) aims to combat illegal logging and associated trade through demand- and supply-side measures.

The EU is a large market for timber products, importing EUR 18.17 billion worth of wood products in 2017. Of this total, products worth EUR 3.78 billion came from tropical countries.

Illegal trade of timber is worth USD 51-152 billion annually – up to 30% of the global timber trade.

Since 2013 the EU Timber Regulation has prohibited operators from placing illegally-harvested timber on the EU market. To avoid this risk, operators must check that the timber they are importing is of legal origin.

Under its FLEGT Action Plan, the EU negotiates bilateral trade agreements with timber-exporting tropical countries that seek to ensure trade in legal timber and timber products only.

Products with FLEGT licences automatically meet EU Timber Regulation requirements, so importers of these products need not check the legal origin of the timber they are importing.

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15 tropical countries are negotiating or implementing FLEGT agreements with the EU. These countries account for 80% of the global tropical timber trade.

In 2016, Indonesia became the first country to issue FLEGT licences to timber products exported to the EU.

Of the EUR 3.78 billion of tropical wood products imported into the EU in 2017...

- 21% were FLEGT-licensed products from Indonesia.
- 54% came from the other 14 countries implementing or negotiating a bilateral trade agreement on FLEGT with the EU (Cameroon, CAR, Côte d’Ivoire, DRC, Gabon, Ghana, Guyana, Honduras, Laos, Liberia, Malaysia, Republic of the Congo, Thailand and Vietnam).

The EU FLEGT Action Plan has helped inspire action in other markets, including in Australia, Japan and South Korea, which have passed legislation to control trade in illegally-harvested timber and in China, where the EU and China are discussing the implementation of similar measures.

References at euflegt.link/ref-closingmarket