

Brussels, 3 December 2010

Environment: New rules on illegal timber come into force across EU

New rules to prevent illegal timber being sold on the European market have come into force across the EU. The legislation will strengthen efforts to halt illegal logging which causes serious environmental damage and biodiversity loss and undermines the efforts of those trying to manage forests responsibly. The Regulation, which was first proposed by the Commission in 2008, was adopted by the EU last month and will apply in all Member States from March 2013.

Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik said: *"With this Regulation, the EU is making an important contribution to the fight against illegal logging, which not only plunders natural resources but also affects those who depend on forests for their livelihood. This is a concrete contribution by the EU towards the fight against loss of biodiversity globally. It will also give European consumers greater confidence about the products they buy."*

Well-managed forests are an important source of renewable materials as well as providing many environmental services. However, illegal logging – driven in part by EU demand for timber – has negative consequences for long term sustainability. The new Regulation will ban the sale on the EU market of illegal timber or of products derived from illegally harvested timber.

EU operators selling timber and timber products for the first time on the EU market – whether they come from the EU or are imported – will need to know where their timber is from. They will have to take steps to make sure that it has been harvested according to the relevant laws of the country of harvest. Traders along the supply chain within the EU will need to keep records of who their timber or timber product was bought from and to whom it was sold.

Member States will be responsible for applying sanctions to operators who break the rules. Legality is defined by reference to the legislation of the country where the timber was harvested. Timber products from countries that have entered into Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreements with the EU will be considered to be in compliance with the Regulation.

The Regulation will apply to a wide range of timber and timber products, including solid timber products, plywood and board products, furniture, pulp and paper.

Although the Regulation has now entered into force, the date of application in all Member States will be 3rd March 2013.

Background

Illegal logging – the harvest, transportation, sale or purchase of timber in violation of applicable national laws – has serious environmental implications. It contributes to the process of deforestation and forest degradation which is responsible for about 20% of global CO₂ emissions and threatens biodiversity. Illegal logging also costs governments significant sums of money in lost revenues, which could otherwise be spent on better healthcare, education and other public services – a particular issue for developing countries – and undermines the implementation of sustainable forest management.

For the text of the Regulation see:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32010R0995:EN:NOT>

For further details, visit: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/illegal_logging.htm