

UK Government Makes ‘Clear-cut’ Decision on Timber NGOs slam government’s decision to approve PEFC and SFI certification schemes

(London, 11th August 2005) A coalition of leading environmental NGOs [1], today, attacked the UK Government’s decision to water down its standards for sustainable timber, by allowing government departments to buy wood from forest certification schemes that approve destructive logging practices.

In a joint statement, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace said the changes were a major setback in the Government’s efforts to only purchase timber from legal and well-managed forests.

The Government has decided to allow timber produced under the PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) schemes to qualify for sustainable timber procurement. Evidence shows the two schemes allow large scale, unsustainable logging in ancient forest areas, the destruction of endangered species habitat and the abuse of indigenous peoples’ rights.

The Government’s acceptance of the PEFC scheme is conditional on the adoption of international criteria by all national schemes, and this will be reviewed in six months. But campaigners say that the scheme should not be accepted because even if they achieve this, their international criteria is still too weak. Approval of the SFI is only applicable to a percentage based labelling scheme that is not yet in use.

Nathan Argent, Greenpeace Forest Campaigner said, *“This decision by the Government will rubber-stamp destructive logging practices that threaten the environment and do not take into consideration indigenous peoples’ rights. We urge both the public and private sector to clearly specify FSC on all contracts in order to guarantee that the timber they are using is from legal and sustainable sources.”*

Ed Matthew, Friends of the Earth’s Forest Campaigner said, *“The Government has come up with an ingenious method for persuading its critics that it only buys sustainable timber. They are officially recognising destructive logging as sustainable logging. Hey presto, all that horrible destructive timber that they buy has disappeared.”*

The announcement follows DEFRA’s Central Point of Expertise on Timber (CPET) [2] re-assessment of the two schemes. Environmental groups have challenged the Government’s conclusions and say the schemes cannot provide consumers with a credible assurance that the timber they buy comes from well-managed forests. The assessment was strictly paper-based, did not address on the ground practices and does not include social criteria meant to address the rights of forest peoples.

Previously only certification by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Canadian Standards Association was considered as proof of legal and sustainable sourcing by the UK government. The only scheme that is generally accepted by all stakeholders, including environment groups, as ensuring environmentally and socially responsible timber sourcing is the Forest Stewardship Council.

Ends.

For more information, please contact the Greenpeace Press Office on: 0207 865 8255 or contact Ed Matthew on 07813 027105

Notes to Editors

[1] WWF, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and Forests and the European Union Resource Network (FERN)

[2] In 2004, the UK Government established the Central Point for Expertise on Timber to assess all five of the internationally recognised certification schemes and provide guidelines for central government departments on legal and sustainable timber procurement. In the first assessment all five schemes studied were found to deliver on UK Government requirements for legality, but only two (FSC and CSA) met the requirements for sustainability. In April 2005, both Boards of the SFI and PEFC certification schemes requested a reassessment following changes to their respective schemes. This reassessment process has found that both SFI and PEFC now meet UK Government requirements for both legal and sustainable timber.

PEFC and SFI

The PEFC standard allows unsustainable logging in ancient forest areas and other High Conservation Value Forests. While standards in some countries are high, forest management standards required to receive PEFC certification are very low in many countries and vary considerably from country to country. The current international standard assessed by the CPET has not been adopted by most national schemes. Moreover, unlike the FSC - which was developed by social, environmental as well as economic groups - the PEFC scheme was solely developed and is dominated by the forest sector. Stakeholder representation from environmental organisations and indigenous people's groups is inadequate.

In Finland, for example, where 5% of the forests are old growth, only half of these are protected, with the remaining 2.5% of Finland's old growth forests currently being logged under the Finnish Forest Certification Scheme, endorsed by PEFC.

The SFI standard allows for the destruction of High Conservation Value Forests including endangered species habitat, as well as the permanent conversion of natural forests for things such as housing development. The scheme also allows individual forest companies to set their own standards by which they will be certified and does not require an adequate chain of custody; and fails to provide any reasonable measures to ensure that indigenous peoples' rights are respected.

In the State of Maine, USA, the SFI failed to prohibit Plumb Creek Timber Co from logging 426,000 acres of forest for low density urban use. This speaks volumes about the SFI and the fact that the label and marketing programs are being used to greenwash timber