

## Press release - Green Deal could be a springboard for ambitious forest action

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**Brussels, December 11 – The European Commission's proposed Green Deal contains two standalone forest initiatives, indicating that EU politicians understand how close forests are to Europeans' hearts. But poor implementation could cause more harm than good, warns Fern, a forests and rights NGO based in Brussels.**

### Tackling Global Deforestation

Today, the Commission unveiled plans for its European Green Deal. The text reinforces last July's [landmark communication on stepping up EU action to protect the world's forests](#), which aims to tackle the negative impacts that EU imports of palm oil, soy, beef, cocoa and others have on tropical forests. This could have a global knock-on effect, since the EU is the second biggest importer of goods that drive deforestation.

*"The fate of the world's forests – and [those that protect them](#) - are in the balance, so today's announcement that von der Leyen's Commission will issue new regulatory measures to support deforestation-free value chains, starting in 2020, are a welcome step forward. NGOs, Parliamentarians, businesses and Member States have specifically called for such regulation as it would ensure companies trading in the EU monitor, address and mitigate the negative impacts of their supply chains on forests and human rights."*

*"EU efforts to be a global leader must be reflected in its work to tackle deforestation. We call on the EU to address the root causes of deforestation by negotiating strong and equal bilateral partnership agreements with forested countries. Such agreements must be negotiated and implemented with support of organisations representing forest-dependent people, since they understand both the problems and the solutions,"* said Hannah Mowat, Fern's campaigns coordinator.

### Restoring European Forests – not burning them

The European Commission is proposing to make the EU carbon neutral by 2050. This will require both drastic reductions of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions as well as removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [reported that forests, wetlands and peatlands](#) will play a crucial role in achieving this. In response the European Green Deal states it will "identify measures to improve and restore degraded ecosystems" through the

EU biodiversity strategy in 2020 and produce the laws to implement these goals in 2021. It will also consider a “natural restoration plan” accompanied by funding.

*“It is good news that the Commission recognises the important role of forests for reaching carbon neutrality. We urge them to develop specific nature legislation including legally binding targets to restore land and forests. This would show the world that Europe is serious about tackling the twin crises of biodiversity extinction and climate change,”* added Mowat.

In the last five years, EU forests’ have [dramatically decreased](#) their ability to absorb carbon dioxide. This is due to increased harvesting, a [trend that started after 2009](#) when the EU encouraged countries to subsidise burning wood to produce energy. We must protect as well as restore our forests and this will only happen if we tackle the drivers of destruction, such as bioenergy. The Commission proposal makes this possible as it suggests reopening the 2030 climate and energy laws in June 2021.

*“The EU climate policies of the past five years have been very harmful to forests. Current laws consider burning trees to generate energy as sustainable and allow governments to subsidise bioenergy production. We need to phase out bioenergy subsidies and end the myth that burning wood is carbon neutral. EU policies must bring back nature, not burn it,”* Mowat concluded.

#### **Notes to the editors**

- According to its own [calculations](#), the EU is the second largest importer of agricultural products resulting from deforestation, with a forested area the size of Portugal lost globally between 1990 and 2005 because of [EU consumption of commodities](#) grown on deforested land.
- Fern’s briefing [Protect and Restore](#) lays out the necessary steps that the EU should undertake to adequately restore its forests.
- A [feasibility study](#) looking into the full range of options to tackle global deforestation was published by the Commission in 2018. They concluded that some options would have little impact but that regulation would have a large effect.
- On December 2, the world’s major chocolate companies [called on](#) the EU to pass a regulation to ensure due diligence in their supply chains.