



A Green New Deal for Forests



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Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, has promised to deliver a European Green Deal in her first 100 days in office. For such a deal to truly tackle the challenges of climate change, it will need to ensure healthy growing forests inside and outside of Europe that are good for people, our climate and nature.

The Green New Deal must therefore:

1. **Address the environmental and human rights impacts linked to imports of agricultural products like soy, beef, palm oil and cocoa.**

WHY: According to a Commission study, an area of forest the size of Portugal was lost globally between 1990 and 2008 because of [EU consumption of commodities](#) grown on deforested land. EU trade with and imports from tropical forested countries continues to drive deforestation linked to serious social and human rights impacts. As a major consumer market, financier and trade power, the EU needs trading rules that avoid harmful impacts on people and the environment.

HOW: As part of the [EU Action Plan to Protect and Restore the World's Forests](#) the EU must create a [regulation](#) which will ensure companies and the finance sector do due diligence to guarantee that products placed on the EU market and investments have not led to recent forest degradation or deforestation or caused human rights abuses. It should do so in a spirit of partnership, that gives space to civil society, since they are best placed to understand the problems and advise their governments. This regulation could learn from previous action to stop illegally logged wood, illegally sourced fish and conflict minerals from entering EU markets.

2. **Ensure all planned and future trade deals aim to eradicate deforestation.**

WHY: The aim of trade deals is to increase trade between countries or blocs. As such there is always the danger that they will worsen climate change and encourage the import of illegal and damaging products. Trade negotiations such as those around the Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership (TTIP) have

Cattle raising in Brazil.
Photo by Nicole Polsterer



therefore often led to popular opposition and protest. This would not be the case if they were used to promote the EU's values in the world.

HOW: The EU should draw lessons from its Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan and apply these to Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations. They should ensure trade agreements contain legally enforceable provisions to protect land rights, avoid deforestation, implement the Paris Agreement and require companies to act in line with international obligations. Enforceable provisions should be agreed in a spirit of partnership, through a multi-stakeholder process including civil society, since they are best placed to understand the problems and advise their governments. In addition, existing FTA civil society monitoring mechanisms should be clarified, strengthened and properly resourced.

3. Restore Europe's forests

WHY: Current EU climate policy hides a dark secret. Around forty per cent of "renewable" energy production comes from cutting and burning European trees, and the EU expects the amount of carbon stored in EU forests to reduce by 40 million tonnes by 2050. In addition, subsidies for bioenergy are encouraging the cutting, pelleting and shipping of forests around the world, and the EU is subsidising harmful agricultural practices to the tune of €58 billion.

HOW: To start restoring EU forests we need to better allocate resources to the promotion of restoration and environmental forest management, and ensure they have the right protection. This would include:

- Introducing a natural carbon removals policy which could be housed in the new EU climate law and be informed by a linked biodiversity strategy. Targets should include indicators that measure ecosystem health (such as soil quality, connectivity of habitats and diversity of species). Any new climate and biodiversity laws to increase carbon removals from land should be in addition to efforts to reduce fossil fuel emissions.

- Ensuring the Circular Economy Package discourages wasteful uses of wood (such as in (low-efficiency) household stoves, single use or short-lived wood-based products and industrial electricity generation). The starting point needs to be an understanding of what forests can sustainably supply, followed by discussions about how it is best used.
- Reviewing the Renewable Energy Directive to introduce strong safeguards that ensure support is only given to bioenergy which significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions and does not negatively impact the environment or people.
- Creating a restoration fund for projects within the EU to naturally remove carbon. This could be supported by Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds. Any fund must define restoration principles that would help fight climate change, improve the health of forests and reinvigorate rural communities.

4. End EU imports of illegal timber from third countries

WHY: The EU has been at the forefront of efforts to end the trade in illegal timber. The FLEGT Action Plan uses innovative trade agreements with forested countries to improve their forest governance whilst introducing the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) to halt illegal imports. This is a participatory process which requires time and dedication and although it has already reduced illegal logging imports substantially, progress has been uneven in partner countries, and patchy implementation of the EUTR creates loopholes for illegal logging.

HOW: Increase financial and political support for the FLEGT Action Plan and ensure all Member States are implementing the EUTR. The EU should ensure effective and faster implementation of the Voluntary Partnership Agreements with timber producing countries, leaving no country behind, and engage more in dialogues with China.