



FRIENDS OF
THE EARTH
SCOTLAND

BLOOD ON GLASGOW'S DOORS ?

A Briefing from Friends of the Earth Scotland

Glasgow City Council is considering spending £30,000 installing a mahogany door at its City Chambers. Because the council is insisting on using wood from the industry-backed Forests Forever scheme, and not that of the independent Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), there can be no guarantee that the timber will come from a truly sustainable source. Worse still, because the Forests Forever is nothing more than a front for industry, with no credible powers of timber certification, the mahogany could well come from an illegal source which may have even resulted in violence and death to those whose land the timber was taken from.

Friends of the Earth is calling for the council to dump the Forest Forever scheme and use only wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Only by doing this can the council be sure the timber will have come from a sustainable and legal source.

The mahogany problem

Britain is the world's second largest importer of Brazilian mahogany. Almost all the mahogany sold in the UK is logged in Brazil's Amazon rainforest and the impact of the trade on the forests is devastating. Large areas of virgin rainforest are destroyed due to mahogany logging and vast quantities of mahogany are illegally procured through over-logging and extracting the wood from indigenous reserves. Under the Brazilian constitution, all logging within indigenous reserves is illegal. The Indians are suffering at the hands of the loggers driven to rob their lands by the international market demands. Loggers invading Indian land introduce diseases and social problems, such as alcohol and break down of the tribal structures. Clashes between Indians trying to protect their land and loggers often ends in physical violence and murder.

Dozens of environmental and human rights groups in Brazil are campaigning to halt the mahogany trade. In response to these groups, Friends of the Earth is campaigning to halt UK mahogany imports until proper and guaranteed environmental and social safeguards are in place. Investigations by the FoE International Amazonia Programme have revealed that several companies supplying the UK with Brazilian mahogany have been found to be operating illegally in protected forest areas and engaging in other illegal activities linked with the trade.

Brazilian Mahogany

The largest area of naturally occurring mahogany coincides with the Brazilian rainforests of the Amazon basin. The mahogany tree takes about 100 years to mature and is distributed sparsely throughout the forest, occurring either as single trees or in small clusters. Overall density of intermediate-sized trees of this species is rarely more than one tree per hectare.

The Impacts of Logging on the Rainforest

In regions where Brazilian mahogany is native, there is a complex relationship between logging, road construction, human settlement, deforestation and habitat loss. Logging directly reduces the mahogany population and destroys the surrounding habitat but road construction encourages loggers to access areas which were previously impenetrable and this increases rates of deforestation and further hinders mahogany regrowth.

The timber industry claims that mahogany is selectively extracted on a low-intensity and environmentally benign basis. However, scientific studies have shown that the ecological damage inflicted during logging operations, including “selective logging” is usually severe and out of all proportion to the relatively small volumes of timber extracted. For example, studies in three logging areas in the Brazilian state of Pará showed that an average of 26 trees (greater than 10 centimetres in diameter) per hectare were damaged for every tree extracted whilst loss of forest canopy averaged 38 per cent over the three sites.

Road building, the movement of heavy machinery and the dragging of logs through the forest causes irreparable damage to other trees and the forest soil. The establishment of logging roads and saw mills opens up new areas to settlers and landless migrants who move in and carry out agricultural practices such as ‘slash and burn’ which leads to decimation of the area. Logging also opens up the canopy of the forest which in turn leads to drying of the ecosystem and disastrous fires.

Most logging operations depend upon the natural regeneration of timber species in order to provide the next crop. However, scientific studies have shown that natural regeneration of Brazilian mahogany in logged forest is minimal and that the species has not been able to reproduce effectively from the present mahogany population. Loggers tend to remove all the trees in one area leaving no seed trees for regeneration. Also the mahogany seedling is not a competitive grower and has difficulty establishing itself in a logged over area.

The Illegal Mahogany Trade

The Brazilian mahogany belt coincides with the southern Amazon's greatest density of Indian reserves. As a direct consequence of over-exploitation and increasing scarcity of the species in the rest of Brazilian Amazonia, a significant proportion of mahogany extraction is now being conducted illegally within these reserves. Logging in indigenous reserves is illegal and contravenes the Brazilian Constitution which guarantees the rights of Indians to occupy and exclusively use their ancestral lands.

Friends of the Earth published 'Mahogany is Murder' in 1993 which catalogued conflicts between Indians and loggers and includes cases of murder of Indians trying to protect their land. Since then, Friends of the Earth has collected documentation and memos from FUNAI, the Brazilian Indian Agency, which identifies a thriving illegal trade within the reserves.

The British Timber Trade's Response

The British Timber Trade Federation has been aware of the illegal mahogany trade for several years. However, it still relies on voluntary agreements to ensure that the mahogany the UK imports has been legally procured at the source in Brazil. Following pressure from environmentalists in 1993, the consortium of logging companies of the Brazilian state of Pará, known as AIMEX, and the UK National Hardwood Association, signed an agreement known as the AIMEX agreement, committing to trade only in legally obtained mahogany. A number of timber merchants and UK agents also became signatories to the AIMEX / NHA agreement.

When faced with the evidence of mahogany being illegally plundered from Indigenous reserves, the Timber Trade Federation claims that the mahogany is procured from areas in the Amazon managed by logging companies who are AIMEX members and to produce a sustainable yield of mahogany. The Timber Trade Federation also states that the activities of the logging companies are being monitored and controlled by the Brazilian Environment Agency (IBAMA). However, IBAMA is extremely under resourced in terms of budget and manpower to police an area the size of Western Europe.

Research carried out by Friends of the Earth has exposed logging companies including those who have signed the AIMEX agreement and supply the UK, as illegally cutting and trading mahogany. The research shows evidence of:

- i. logging companies cutting more mahogany than their management plans allow and trading in mahogany which has been illegally procured outside the management plan areas;
- ii. IBAMA control and inspection activities lacking even the most basic professional requirements so any claim that timber has been legally procured is unlikely to be certified;
- iii. logging companies, including those belonging to AIMEX, engaging in illegal activities such as transporting unidentified species of timber, omitting to report the origin of mahogany and redirecting mahogany to an uncertified location;
- iv. logging within indigenous reserves

Forests Forever is the timber industry

In an interview with the local evening paper (Evening Times) a council spokesperson said: "We are satisfied that the wood we use comes from properly managed forests and renewable sources. It comes from Forests Forever which oversees that it does not come from endangered areas."

Sadly Forests Forever is nothing more than a front for the timber industry. As their own website explains: "The Forests Forever Campaign was launched as an initiative by the Timber Trade Federation on behalf of all timber users and processors in the United Kingdom". So much of an industry body are they that the Forests Forever campaign even shares the same office, phone and fax as the Timber Trade Federation:

Forests Forever 4th Floor, Clareville House 26/27 Oxendon Street, London, SW1Y 4EL
Tel: (0171) 839 1891 Fax: (0171) 930 0094

Timber Trade Federation 4th Floor, Clareville House 26/27 Oxendon Street, London, SW1Y 4EL
Tel: (0171) 839 1891 Fax: (0171) 930 0094

While Forests Forever's broad aims to "help safeguard the forests of the world, Britain's future timber supplies and to promote the good cause of wood" are laudable, with such a cosy relationship with the industry it has little credibility.

Sustainable timber - the Forest Stewardship Council

Given the voluntary nature of the agreements involved in Timber Trade Federation (and the Forest Forever) schemes, neither can be considered proof of a wood being legally or sustainably sourced. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) assessments, in contrast, are performed by independent certifying bodies accredited by FSC International and require annual monitoring. A summary report on each forest assessment must also be publicly available. Consequently, the FSC is the only scheme that meets all requirements for a credible forest certification scheme, and is the only one internationally recognised and recommended by Friends of the Earth and other environmental groups.

Mahogany is Murder Campaign

Since Friends of the Earth's Mahogany is Murder Campaign in 1990's, UK imports of Brazilian Mahogany have dropped by about 98 per cent.

In 1998, Friends of the Earth publicly shamed the Ministry of Defence for ordering mahogany from Brazil for paneling in the ward rooms of one of their battleships. The result was the MoD reviewing their timber purchasing policy which now specifies that timber must be independently certified. In the same year Friends of the Earth also exposed the then Cabinet Minister Jack Cunningham's order for a mahogany table for his office, the original suppliers of which could give no guarantees of sustainability. Following extensive media coverage, the Cabinet Office withdrew the order within two days. We then met with the Cabinet office to advise on a more sustainable option (locally produced oak from FSC endorsed woodlands).

What does Friends of the Earth want?

Although the import of mahogany has declined drastically, illegal logging in the Amazon is still common due to the continuing demand here and abroad. By choosing to use mahogany from Forests Forever Glasgow City Council may be unwittingly encouraging this demand.

Friends of the Earth believes that when it comes to green purchasing Government establishments should be setting an example to us all. Friends of the Earth is calling for the council to dump the Forest Forever scheme and use only wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). If the MoD can change their ways then so can the council. Failure to do so could leave blood on Glasgow's doors.

Further reading / useful links

Reports of illegal logging in the Arara Indian reserve in the state of Para, Brazil (July 1999)
<http://www.amazoncoop.org/feb22/invasion/invasion.html>

Plunder for profit - The UK and Brazilian mahogany trade (January 1998)
A fascinating and at times dramatic account of a nine month, on-the-ground investigation by two British investigative journalists who travelled into the Amazonian interior to see the illegal mahogany trade.
http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/plunder_for_profit.pdf

Sustainability and the Trade in Tropical Rainforest Timber (October 1997)
This briefing describes some of the underlying technical issues concerning 'sustainability' in tropical forests.
http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/sust_trade_tropical_timber.html

Timber - Mahogany (August 1996)
Outlines the issues behind Friends of the Earth's 'Mahogany is Murder' campaign. Types and distribution of mahogany are explained and the devastating impacts on the Brazilian rainforest and its people, due to the mahogany trade between Brazil and the UK, are outlined.
http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/timber_mahogany.html

Forest Stewardship Council

Tel: 01686 413916 Fax: 01686 412176 Web: <http://www.fsc-uk.demon.co.uk/>

Based on a briefing by FoE EWNI. This version compiled by Lang Banks.



FRIENDS OF
THE EARTH
SCOTLAND

Friends of the Earth Scotland,
72 Newhaven Rd, Edinburgh, EH6 5QG
Tel: 0131 554 9977, Fax: 0131 554 8656
E-mail: info@foe-scotland.org.uk Website: www.foe-scotland.org.uk

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What you can do

Write, call or e-mail Glasgow City Council's Chief Executive, James Andrews expressing your concern at the council's plans for a £30,000 mahogany door. Explain that the Forest Forever scheme cannot guarantee the timber has come from a legal or sustainable source and that the Council should instead use only wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

Write to:

James Andrews, Chief Executive
Glasgow City Council, City Chambers, George Square
Glasgow G2 1DU
Fax: 0141 287 3627
E-mail: martine.stewart@ced.glasgow.gov.uk
<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/html/council/tbindex.htm>

Alternatively please cut and paste the message below into a new e-mail and send it to:

James Andrews (Chief Executive) c/o: martine.stewart@ced.glasgow.gov.uk

Please CC to: action@foe-scotland.org.uk

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear James Andrews

Don't let there be blood on Glasgow's doors

I understand that Glasgow City Council is considering spending £30,000 installing a mahogany door at its City Chambers. Because the council is insisting on using wood from the industry-backed Forests Forever scheme, and not that of the independent Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), there can be no guarantee that the timber will come from a truly sustainable source. Worse still, because the Forests Forever is nothing more than a front for industry, with no credible powers of timber certification, the mahogany could well come from an illegal source which may have even resulted in violence and death to those whose land the timber was taken from.

I urge the council to dump the Forest Forever scheme and use only wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Only by doing this can the council be sure the timber will have come from a sustainable and legal source.

Yours sincerely

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