

Good wood and growing pains

Timber council optimistic despite walkout

Eco-friendly wood has come a step closer to the shops with the creation of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an independent standard-setter for ethical timber production. Within six months, the FSC hopes to define minimum standards for socially and environmentally benign forest management throughout the world.

Movement – withdrew from voting participation in the organisation at its recent launch in Toronto.

The problem? Too much forest industry representation, says Simon Counsell, Friends of the Earth's timber campaigner. "The FSC meeting was heavily dominated by companies with economic interests in logging," he explained. "We don't believe that a system that involves industry in the decision-making process is appropriate. Industry cannot be allowed to set the environmental standards it should follow."

But his remarks have bemused the FSC's supporters – almost 100 groups representing social, environmental, economic and indigenous peoples' interests.

"It's difficult to believe we were at the same meeting," says WWF's Francis Sullivan. "FoE seems to think that any form of industry representation in the FSC will destroy it. We disagree."

The FSC's economic members, he points out, can appoint only two out of nine board members, whose commercial interests must be demonstrably sympathetic to FSC aims and principles. And, he adds,



Good wood (from B&Q). There's just not enough of it around.

It will then regulate organisations taking on the role of timber certifiers, which will provide eco-labels for consumers.

But despite the FSC's laudable aims, many environmental groups – including Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the Environmental Investigation Agency, the Rainforest Action Network and the World Rainforest

"The real power will be with the membership, where industry is limited to 25 per cent of the vote."

Sullivan's view is confirmed by Rupert Oliver of Britain's Timber Trade Federation (TTF). "The FSC's membership is a bit problematic," he complains. "We would question its representative nature." His preference, however, is for "authoritative certification" by governments, or by the International Tropical Timber Organisation (see below).

But not all British companies share the TTF's views. Among the FSC's firmest supporters, for example, are DIY chains B&Q and Do It All, and M&N Norman, Scotland's biggest hardwood importer. All of these have stopped

using Brazilian mahogany until independently certified supplies are available. The FSC also enjoys the support of Panama's Kuna Indians and many non-governmental organisations, including the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific, the Brazilian Rubber Tappers' Union, Conservation International, the Rainforest Alliance and WWF.

As for the groups that have dropped out of the process, WWF remains optimistic. "It may not even be the role of groups like FoE and Greenpeace to be in the FSC," suggests Sullivan. "Maybe it is better that they stay outside, where they can keep a close eye on us and make sure we're doing a good job – and scream like hell if we're not."

The cutters and the keepers

The International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) is an intergovernmental body formed in 1983 to oversee the world trade in tropical timber. Last month, in a clear response to the Forest Stewardship Council's progress, timber certification was at last on its agenda, but the prospects for action remain slim.

Temperate and boreal zone countries, including Britain, refuse to allow ITTO to extend its mandate to them, and will only pledge to manage their forests 'sustainably' under an International Forest Convention – an unresurrected casualty of last year's Earth

Summit. Any ITTO certification system would, therefore, leave out the US, Canada, Chile, Russia and Scandinavian countries, where primary forest is being logged about as fast as it is in the tropics.

By contrast, tropical countries have promised to log only 'sustainable' forests by 2000. But there is little agreement on what sustainable means and even less on how the promise might translate into verifiable consumer guarantees. At present, the FSC would seem to offer the only prospect of a credible, independent, international system of timber certification.

PROTESTS

Court upholds right to destroy

Judge throws book at defenders of Clayoquot

The first 70 Canadians to be tried for their part in the protests against the logging of Clayoquot Sound on Vancouver Island (see BBC WILDLIFE, October 1993, p59) have been fined a total of C\$56,500 and jailed for a total of five and a half years. They are the first of some 770 people facing charges of criminal contempt over breaches of injunctions taken out by logging multinational MacMillan Bloedel. The minimum sentence, received by 27 defendants, was \$1,000 and 45 days.

Harsh penalties were necessary, said Justice John Bouck of the British Columbia Supreme Court, to preserve Canada's "rights and freedoms," and because the defendants had "infringed a legal right . . . of MacMillan Bloedel to cut timber." The licence to log was given by the BC government, which now has the largest single shareholding in the company. **OT**

ANIMAL TRADE

The peddling princess

Taipei arrest exposes diplomatic loophole

Soon after the US threatened to impose trade sanctions on Taiwan if it didn't make more effort to enforce its wildlife-smuggling laws (see BBC WILDLIFE, November 1993, p57), police at Taipei's Chiang Kai Shek airport made one of their biggest arrests ever. A princess from Bhutan – Dekiy Wang-Chuck, a 43-year-old Cambridge graduate – was caught in September with 22 Indian rhino horns and nine bear gall bladders.

According to a report of an hour-long interview with the princess – carried out at the airport's police offices by Joe Loh of TRAFFIC Taipei – the princess, who owns a soft-drink bottling company near Bhutan's border with India, said that middlemen periodically offered her Indian rhino horns. She said that she had collected these 22 horns, which were from both adults and juveniles, over about a year, and had spent a total of about \$100,000, paying on average

\$6,666 a kilogram for them.

Though she is a Buddhist, she had no qualms, she explained, about buying the horns, as she had not killed the animals personally.

The princess said that, knowing how valuable the horns were in traditional Chinese medicine, she had flown to Hong Kong to sell them. Since she had no contacts there, she visited the traditional medicine shops with a sample. When she failed to find any buyers, she said, she decided to try Taiwan.

She had a diplomatic passport, but since Bhutan, like most countries, doesn't recognise Taiwan, the police refused to release her. At the end of September, she was finally freed on £1,220 bail, and her passport was confiscated.

In the mid-1980s, most of the horn from poached rhinos in India was smuggled from Calcutta to Singapore before going to Taiwan. Now Bhutan has apparently become the main trading link.

Partly because of the perceived Taiwanese demand for rhino horn, there has recently been some of the worst poaching ever recorded of the greater one-horned rhino in India. Assam was home to 76 per cent of this species in 1992 – 1,459 animals – but in the first five months of 1993, 22 were killed in Manas and 30 in Kaziranga National Park. The only good news to come from the princess was that the price of horn had fallen since 1990. This is no doubt due to the 37 per cent decrease in 1993 in Taiwan's retail price to \$41,000 a kilo – while African horn has decreased by 47 per cent to \$4,720 retail.

Corruption, something conservationists have tended to underestimate, is a main reason for the decline of rhinos in both Asia and Africa. Park staff have poached rhinos, officials have colluded with customs officers and illegal traders, and diplomats have bought and sold horn. The incident with the princess is an important reminder that customs and police officers on both continents must be on the watch for diplomats. **LUCY VIGNE, ESMOND BRADLEY MARTIN**