

Obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market

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The United Kingdom briefed the Council on its views concerning the draft regulation laying down the obligations of operators placing timber and timber products on the market, designed to minimise the risk of illegal timber being placed on the Community market.

It notes that the Swedish Presidency held a discussion on a proposal for the timber due diligence Regulation at the December 2009 Agriculture and Fisheries Council. The legislation requires all operators placing timber on the EU market for the first time to minimise the risk that it is illegal by undertaking due diligence on their supply chains.

The UK welcomes EU legislation to reduce the trade in illegal timber but we regret that this proposed legislation does not include a prohibition on the first placing of illegal timber on the market. Illegal logging is a major environmental issue and threatens to undermine our climate objectives. A prohibition would complement the due diligence approach and enable Member States to take action against operators that place illegal timber on the market. It would incentivise proper application of the risk-based system.

Concerns over the impacts of a prohibition on domestic producers are unwarranted. There will be minimal administrative burden or financial cost to operators in addition to those already required in developing and running their due diligence systems. Operators who are complying with the law will benefit economically from increased confidence in their products and by removing illegal timber which distorts and undercuts the market for legal timber.

The EU must show leadership on this issue and produce strong legislation that will be effective in the fight against illegal logging. The Council will need to reach agreement with European Parliament, and we know that they have supported a prohibition. We urge all Member States to take a flexible approach and work with the European Parliament to achieve an ambitious Regulation which ensures that illegal timber cannot be placed on our market.