



EUTR News – March to May 2020

This issue of ClientEarth's EUTR News provides an update on the operation of the EU's law to address illegal logging, the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR), from March to May 2020. Unlike previous editions, this issue will not just include information on what the European Commission is doing to ensure the proper application of the EUTR as well as updates on similar legislation internationally, but will also include a couple of publications considering the effects and consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on the sector.

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1. European Commission support to implementation and enforcement of the EUTR

While preparations for the European Commission's planned Fitness Check of the EUTR and FLEGT Regulation in 2020 are underway, these past three months have not seen much activity from the Commission specifically on the EUTR, other than the latest UNEP-WCMC briefing.

European Commission's latest Briefing Note for Competent Authorities

In March 2020, the Commission published the [latest briefing note](#) for Competent Authorities implementing the EUTR (covering December 2019-January 2020) produced by UNEP-WCMC. Previous editions can be found [here](#).

2. Other EU and international updates

European Commission presented its EU Recovery Plan in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and adjusted its Work Programme for 2020. It also unveiled two closely linked strategies to tackle biodiversity loss and increase the sustainability of food production, the EU Biodiversity and Farm-to-Fork strategies. In China, the draft of a new Forest Law was approved and will be effective from 1st July 2020. Chatham House published new EUTR policy assessments while the FAO released a report containing the main findings of the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020.

Updates from the European Commission

On 27th May, the European Commission presented its [EU Recovery Plan](#) as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Alongside the recovery plan, the Commission adjusted its [Work Programme for 2020](#), which aims at fast-tracking initiatives that support Europe's recovery. While there is no specific mention of the EUTR and its upcoming evaluation, the documents do mention the [postponement](#) of the revision of the EU Forest Strategy to Q1 2021.

Also on 27th May, the Commission unveiled two closely linked strategies to tackle biodiversity loss and increase the sustainability of food production, the [EU Biodiversity](#) and [Farm-to-Fork \(F2F\)](#) strategies.

Both strategies are likely to have some important overlaps with the development of the EU's policies to tackle global deforestation and forest degradation. While the new Farm-to-Fork Strategy tackles agro-forestry, deforested lands and carbon sequestration by forests, the new EU Biodiversity strategy for 2030 mentions the need to take into consideration mapping and protecting of primary and old-growth forests in the EU, agroforestry support, forest resilience, afforestation and reforestation.

Chatham House publishes new EUTR policy assessments

In May 2020, Chatham House published new forest policy assessments for France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. These are all available on Chatham House's [Forest Governance project website](#).

The policy assessments use a number of variables to track the progress made in tackling illegal logging and its related trade and notes improvements occurring in these countries.

New evidence suggests Ivorian timber merits a tougher EUTR due diligence approach

A commentary was published [by Mongabay in March 2020](#), which suggests that Ivorian timber merits a more detailed application of EUTR due diligence measures. The data (much of it coming from the Open Timber Portal) shows that limited resources for EUTR due diligence measures need to be allocated strategically to ensure that enforcement has maximum impact. The commentary states that imports from countries with relatively low production volumes like Ivory Coast may be subject to less stringent due diligence compared to imports from high-volume countries.

The commentary also reveals that a simple low-cost document-based evaluation in Ivory Coast reveals several risk factors, some of which could easily have been detected through a cursory risk assessment process. It ends with a recommendation: that EUTR actors work more closely with independent forestry sector monitors to develop more cost-effective techniques to help ensure broad geographic coverage of stringent due diligence processes.

Upcoming EUTR-like Chinese Forest Law

[According to Global Traceability](#), the draft of a [new Chinese Forest Law](#) was approved in March and will be effective from 1st July 2020.

A large part of the changes focus on China's domestic forestry and timber industries and the law now includes a new provision on timber imports and timber legality (article 65), and provisions on forest tenure. It also lays down as an objective that the management of 'public-welfare' and commercial forests should be healthy, of a high quality and ensure an effective ecological forestry system. Another notable change is that the updated Chinese Forest Law would remove the obligation to apply for a Timber Transportation Permit from the harvest site to the primary processor.

2020 Global Forum on Forest Governance – dates announced

The [next Global Forum on Forest Governance](#) will take place (virtually) at Chatham House on 13th-17th July 2020.

FAO releases Global Forest Resources Assessment Report

In May 2020, the FAO [released a report](#) containing the main findings of the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 (FRA 2020). FRA 2020 examines the status of, and trends in, more than 60 forest-related variables in 236 countries and territories in the period 1990–2020.

The information provided by FRA 2020 presents a comprehensive view of the world's forests and the ways in which this essential resource is changing globally.

3. Publications and resources

Over the past three months, many publications and resources have been released. Below is a selection of resources and publications that aim to inform stakeholders across the EU and internationally on progress and key elements related to the EUTR.

NEPCon EUTR seminars and training

NEPCon training seminars, touching on forest laws and chain of custody that were planned to take place in Tartu and Copenhagen in April and May were postponed. However, registration for [training in Berlin in October is open](#).

Rosewood revealed, a new tool from EIA

Back in 2019, EIA released a web-based tool '[Rosewood Revealed](#)' showing the quantity and value of illegal rosewood imported into China from Ghana every month. Although the quantity of export of the species has been declining since Ghana's export ban began in March 2019, EIA's recent data shows that just over 1000 tonnes of rosewood, worth over US\$710, 656, were exported to China in March 2020.

4. Potential effects of Covid-19 on the timber sector

The past three months have seen the publication of many articles, evidence-based studies and expert interpretations on the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis on policy and legislation relating to illegal logging (including the EUTR) and forest management generally. While we provide references to two media reports below, many other publications are available which concentrate on the links between the destruction of biodiversity and the development of pandemics generally.

Indonesia backtracked on plans to dilute timber regulations

After mobilisation by various stakeholders including civil society organisations, the Indonesian Government backed away from a plan to stop requiring wood exporters to obtain licenses for timber products from the point of processing to export. This regulation would have come into effect on 27th May and was proposed as a way to stimulate the country's economy following the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. More information on this can be found in [this article](#) from the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA).

Illegal timber trade continuing in Myanmar despite the pandemic

According to an [ASEAN Today](#) article on 8th May, the Covid-19 pandemic had not led to an immediate reduction in levels of illegal logging occurring in Myanmar. The article states that on 9th April, two weeks after the country confirmed its first case of Covid-19, the country's Forest Department announced that authorities seized over [840 tons](#) of illegal timber in the course of a single week.