

1. Background

From April 2009 UK Government timber procurement policy will change to only accept timber that has been verified as sustainable, or licensed under FLEGT agreements.

From April 2015 only sustainable timber will be accepted.

In order to identify challenges to the practical implementation of the policy, and develop potential solutions to these, a consultation period was launched. This began on 5 July and will end on September the 27th 2007. CPET is coordinating the consultation and will develop and provide recommendations for practical implementation to Defra based on the comments received. As a part of the consultation on the new policy a meeting was held with representatives from the NGO community facilitated by CPET.

Summary of the meeting

Rachel Butler outlined the policy consultation process, how this will be concluded and the results of the trade consultation.

2. Key issues raised by stakeholders

NGOs are in principle in agreement with the policy and support the recent changes. However, they raised the following concerns with the government policy and its implementation;

Social issues

- a) Social issues are an important part of sustainability and should be considered as part of the UK government's criteria. The UK government recently signed the UN declaration on protecting indigenous rights; they could potentially have a different policy for timber.
- b) In the past, WWF have presented information prepared by barristers that clearly demonstrates a legal case for including social issues as part of the criteria.

Category A/Category B evidence

- a) There is a belief that the terms of reference that CPET operate under are bias towards political expediency rather than assessing the certification schemes against the criteria objectively. Independent assessments of the schemes have proved that several do not actually meet the government's criteria.
- b) Category A categorises a range of schemes as equal; there is no provision to allow a preference within that.
- c) Category A assessments were desk-based; the general feeling that CPET should be mandated to consider wider evidence on the ground was suggested; particularly as this has been done on one occasion with an MTCC forest visit.

- d) It was suggested that a formal complaints procedure be introduced; to ensure the complaints were focused this could be based on evidence that shows where the schemes have deviated from the criteria.
- e) In the case of Category B evidence the guidelines should require, at the very minimum, 3rd party verification and a risk register.

Implementation

- a) The government has failed to ensure full implementation of the policy which has led to high profile examples of where alleged illegal timber has entered the supply chain e.g. Admiralty Arch and Nelson's Column.
- b) The policy is not seen by trade as a key driver for timber procurement; some others are such as BREEAM.
- c) Implementation should include
 - a. Greater training & awareness on how to check and monitor the at the ground level
 - b. Spot-checking to ensure compliance
 - c. Financial penalties on companies who do not meet the contract requirements
 - d. Greater monitoring and evaluation
 - e. Public reporting on timber to be mandatory with published progress on targets set.

General comments

- a) The UK government policy has had some success in improving some certification schemes performance.
- b) Social impact assessments could be instigated to map out where the potential issues are; particularly if supplying countries claim they cannot meet the new requirements. This could be done in partnership with Dfid and the ODI.
- c) Initiatives in some regions have proved successful for small forest owners particularly in the UK through combining the requirements of the UKWAS standard with the woodland grant scheme, aimed at small woodlands; could this be replicated in some way.
- d) Non-VPA countries should be dealt with through EU legislation to outlaw the import of illegal timber and wood products to ensure a level playing field for the trade.
- e) The concept of an international body to assess certification schemes and evidence of legality/sustainability is likely to be unworkable.
- f) The use of a risk assessment method such as the CPI index is a useful starting point.
- g) CPET could provide wider information on countries/species that are risky to support architects and buyers in their choice of timber.
- h) Local authorities are a key target to adopt the government's timber procurement policy. The discussion did focus on the difficulties and experiences of engaging them. Some ideas on considering targets and engaging with the regional bodies and other organisations such as IDEA were discussed. A meeting at Chatham House to discuss a way forward is set for November and this includes LA's, government, NGOs, trade and CPET.