



global witness

All eyes on the European Commission, as crucial EU decision on deforestation due “in a matter of weeks”

In the coming weeks, the European Commission is set to make a momentous decision about the fate of the world’s forests.

The decision rests on whether the EU will develop an Action Plan on deforestation and degradation, as envisaged by the Council and Parliament in 2013 in the context of the 7th EU Environment Action Programme.¹

Failure to act would mean the EU will be unable to deliver on its international commitments to halt deforestation by 2020, to protect our climate and biodiversity, and to guarantee that human rights including the rights of indigenous peoples are respected.²

Research commissioned by the EC in 2013 was influential in grasping the extent of the EU’s consumption in driving deforestation in producer countries.^{3,4}

A feasibility study on policy options to step up EU action against deforestation⁵ is due to be made public very shortly by the Commission, along with a decision on the next steps. We expect the feasibility study to conclude that meaningful action is feasible and necessary.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013D1386>

² <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/pdf/1.%20Report%20analysis%20of%20impact.pdf>

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/deforestation.htm>;

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/pdf/ToR%20-%20Feasibility%20Study%20Deforestation%20final_dec15.pdf

Many NGOs,⁶ and EU Member States,^{7,8} have asked the Commission for an Action Plan on deforestation and forest degradation. Members of the European Parliament have made the same plea, most recently in a Parliament resolution on palm oil and the deforestation of rainforests.⁹

In November 2017, the Commission stated it was still reflecting on what action to take.¹⁰

On 10 January 2018, First Vice President of the Commission, Frans Timmermans, and Vice-President Jyrki Katainen, informed NGOs that *“the Commission will be making a decision on a possible EU initiative on deforestation in the coming weeks”*.

The Vice Presidents further stated that *“as part of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and of the Paris agreement, addressing the environmental and social challenges of deforestation and forest degradation is more than ever an important matter for the European Union and in particular for the European Commission”*.

The importance of the EU showing leadership to end deforestation and forest degradation cannot be overstated. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 8.8 million hectares of natural forest were lost each year between 2010 and 2015, a total area roughly equivalent to Sweden. Forest destruction is a major environmental problem, accelerating biodiversity loss and climate change, and often associated with human rights violations against indigenous peoples and local communities.

Given the gravity of the situation, NGOs call on the Commission to commit to developing a formal action plan, including legislative measures, as soon as possible within the course of the coming months.

Europe’s environmental legacy and the future of globally significant forests are both at stake. All eyes on the Commission!

⁶ <https://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/default/files/documents/deforestation-4.pdf>

⁷ The 7th EU Environment Action Programme¹ was signed off by the EU Council of ministers as representatives of member states, and further member states within the Amsterdam Declaration have similarly called for an Action Plan.

⁸ <https://www.euandgvc.nl/documents/publications/2015/december/7/declarations>

⁹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2017-0098+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

¹⁰ <http://www.palmoilandfood.eu/sites/default/files/17.%20Helene%20Perier%20EPOC%20EU%20Work%20on%20deforestation.pdf>