

A Claytons rainforest policy

IN FEBRUARY the New Zealand Timber Importers Association (NZTIA) announced their much-heralded policy on rainforest timber imports as the answer to the future of the trade.

The centrepiece of the policy was the concept of “sustainable management”. This was defined as “harvesting at a rate which keeps pace with the time it takes for a new generation to grow”, or in other words simply sustained timber yield. Unfortunately, this definition leaves out considerations of soil and water, the maintenance of biodiversity, the value of non-timber products, and the uses and rights of the customary owners. It reduces a complex forest ecosystem to a standing crop of timber.

According to the World Bank and other organisations, there is not a single example of sustained yield logging of a tropical rainforest anywhere in the world, let alone management that maintains the myriad of other forest functions. As World Bank environmental officer Lee Talbot points out:

In practical terms, no commercial logging of tropical forests has been proven to be sustainable from the standpoint of the forest ecosystem, and any such logging must be recognised as mining, not sustaining the basic forest resource.

So what are the sources the timber importers are proposing? They have yet to cite a forest that meets their “sustainable management” requirements.

The importers give no indication as to when they intend to make the transition to sustainability. They also omit how they intend to monitor and certify this “sustainably” sourced timber. It would seem that the importers believe that their timbers already come from sustainable sources. The large number of unanswered questions that remain undermine the credibility of the new policy.

Problems with the importation of tropical timbers are, of course, not confined to New Zealand. In Britain (the largest importer of these timbers in the European Community), a survey last year of over 600 companies by the World Wide Fund for Nature found that virtually all “green” claims



GRANT ROSOMAN

Seats made from balau in Wellington's Frank Kitts Park. NZTIA President Bruce Nimmo wrongly claimed in 1990 that the balau “was sourced from sustainably managed forests in Malaysia”. Wellington City Council has subsequently banned the use of tropical rainforest timbers.

about tropical timbers were unsubstantiated. Most of the claims centred around “sustainability” of the source.

To the New Zealand importers' credit, they have recognised the unsustainability of timber from Sarawak, and have consequently chosen to not “knowingly” buy from there. At present, however, there is no way of knowing whether timber processed and then exported from

states last year, as well as the catastrophic floods which killed thousands in the Philippines and also in Thailand in recent years. Protecting rainforests and replanting deforested areas is essential if climate change is to be slowed or averted.

HOW LONG can the timber trade and human demand for wood keep on desecrating these precious forests? Recent estimates



WWF-NZ

Logging not only causes direct damage to tropical rainforests, it opens them up to agricultural development and fire.

What you can do

- Use the alternatives to rainforest timbers.
- Write to the Ministers of Conservation, Environment, Forestry, and External Relations and Trade, calling for restrictions on the import of rainforest timbers, pointing out the contradiction in marketing pine overseas to save rainforests while still importing rainforest timbers ourselves.
- Support the planting of special-purpose timber species in New Zealand, such as eucalypts, cypress species and others that do not require chemical preservation treatment.

by international rainforest ecologist Dr Norman Myers suggest that by the year 2000, apart from areas already protected, the only significant areas of tropical rainforest remaining will be in Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea, the Zaire basin, the Guyanan countries of South America and the western Brazilian Amazon. South-east Asia, where a quarter of the earth's tropical moist forests are found, accounts for 30 percent or 42,000 square kilometres annually of world-wide tropical forest loss.

Commercial logging isn't the only direct cause of tropical rainforest destruction but it is a major primary cause.

The UN Food and Agricultural Organisation calculated that over half of global deforestation is in already logged-over forest land (70 percent for South-east Asia). Logging opens up a forest to secondary factors such as encroachment by landless settlers, agricultural development and to fire.

THERE IS SOME HOPE on the horizon with concern from many in the timber and building trade. For the past year the New Zealand Rainforests Coalition (including Forest and Bird) has been meeting with timber