

TIMBER QUEENSLAND POLICY STATEMENT

Imported Timber

October 2005

Trade in illegal and unsustainable timber distorts trade, suppresses prices, and causes major irreversible damage to the environment. It is estimated that almost 10% of timber and wood products imported to Australia is of suspicious origin. With ever-increasing limitations on native forest availability and in spite of expanded timber plantations, Queensland can only meet 70% of its timber demand. Much of the remainder is met by timber imported from South East Asia and the Pacific. Brisbane is a major gateway for imported timber and rapid population growth is driving up demand and heightening concern about the issue of illegal and unsustainable timber imports in this market.

Timber Queensland views continued importation of timber into Australian markets from illegal and unsustainable sources is bad for all TQ members. Dubious importing practices are already contributing to job losses in Queensland where local producers are arguably being unfairly undercut. Meanwhile, a lack of public confidence in all imported timber damages the good reputations of the vast majority of legitimate importers. TQ has an important role to play in meeting the public's reasonable expectation and a right to know that the timber they use comes from legal and sustainable sources.

Timber Queensland has taken significant pride in its reputation as a strong supporter of sustainable forestry initiatives. The ground-breaking SEQFA, for example, is part of a unique industry-supported transition from state native forests to plantation resources in Queensland. The industry's commitment to transition completely out of state native hardwood forests into plantations and private forests is a position unique in Australia. However, unless it is properly handled, the illegal and unsustainable timber imports issue has the potential to undo much of the progress we are making in this state. On that basis, Timber Queensland strongly supports the commitment of the federal government to act on this matter and we are working closely with government and other stakeholders to assist Australia in addressing this challenging policy issue.

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The Timber Queensland approach will be to look for the strongest practicable measures available to Australia consistent with its WTO obligations and with the reasonable expectations of industry and the Australian public. The most effective and practicable policy approach would be to pursue legality and sustainability sequentially and in that order. The systems that might be put in place could act as the foundations for dealing with the sustainability issue at a later time. While we recognise a role for capacity building as part of the solution, these measures are likely to be ineffective on their own.

Timber Queensland is supportive of exploring a multi-lateral approach. However, if the connection between the trade measure and the environmental goal is tight, then unilateral environmental impediments illegal and unsustainable timber imports may also pass WTO muster. The Australian government conceivably could pursue a WTO consistent trade measure on illegal timber and work with other countries, industry and stakeholders to address the challenge of certifying sustainable management of forests.

Against this background, Timber Queensland:

1. supports commercial trade in timber derived from sustainably managed forests, both domestically and internationally, however, believes that there are major benefits to Australia from the use of locally produced timber.
2. is committed to and endorses appropriate regulations and credible certification that encourage and demonstrate sustainable forest practices both in the public and private sector, domestically and internationally.
3. believes that Australia has a sustainable and very high standard of forest management in comparison to many alternative sources of timber, and supports efforts to promote this fact to the consuming public.

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4. encourages the Federal and State Governments to:-

- Institute regulatory requirements and other appropriate policy measures that prevent to the maximum practicable extent the importation of timber from illegal and/or unsustainably managed sources.
- Promote the sustainable forest management credentials of Australian sourced timber.
- Increase the supply of sustainably managed Australian timber through more effective forest management and increased establishment of plantations (including durable species).
- Ensure all timber (locally produced and imported) is fit-for-purpose in its promoted application, meets relevant Australian Standards and regulatory requirements.

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