



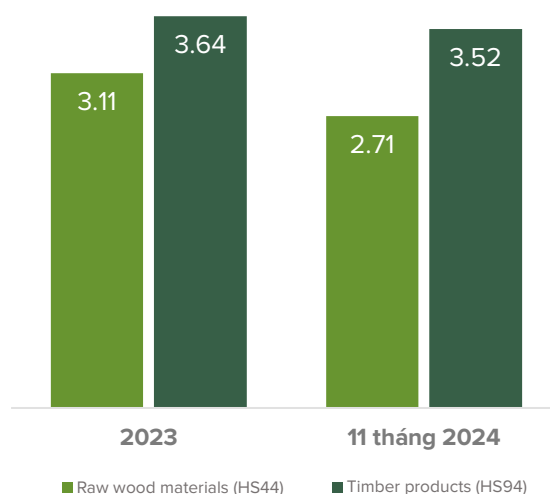
South Korea's regulations on timber and timber products imported from Vietnam

South Korea represents one of the most significant export markets for Vietnam's timber industry. The primary product categories exported from Vietnam to this market include wood pellets, plywood, and wooden furniture. Understanding and adhering to South Korea's requirements regarding the legality and quality of imported timber products is critical for Vietnamese exporters to maintain and stabilize their presence in this market. This newsletter provides insights into the South Korean market, focusing on the product groups Vietnam exports to this destination and the specific regulatory requirements imposed on imported timber goods.

1. The South Korean timber and timber products market

South Korea boasts abundant forest resources, with a forest coverage rate of 64.5%, ranking it behind only Finland, Sweden, and Japan globally (FAO, 2020). In 2023, South Korea imported timber and timber products valued at USD 6.75 billion, comprising USD 3.11 billion in raw timber (HS 44) and USD 3.64 billion in processed timber products (HS 94)¹. For the first 11 months of 2024, the import value of timber and timber products reached approximately USD 2.71 billion (HS 44) and USD 3.52 billion (HS 94).

Figure 1. Import value of timber and timber products into South Korea, 2023–2024
(billion USD)

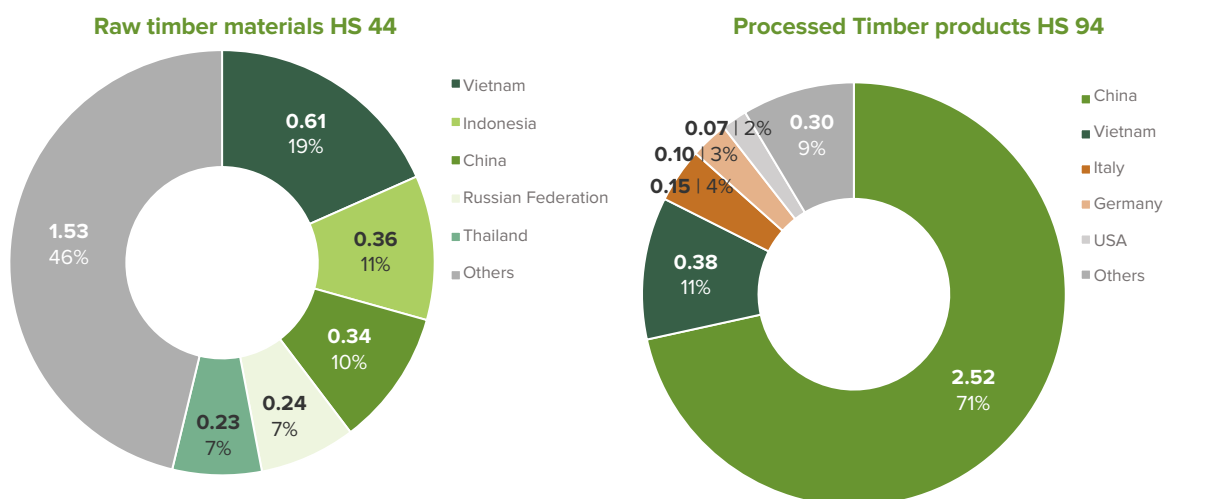


Source: Calculated by the International Trade Centre (ITC) based on statistics from the Korea Customs and Trade Development Institute (KCTDI)

¹ Trade Performance HS : Imports of wood and articles of wood, wood charcoal (2023, in USD thousands) ([link](#))

During the first 11 months of 2024, the leading suppliers of raw timber to South Korea were Vietnam (USD 610 million), Indonesia (USD 365 million), China (USD 343 million), and the Russian Federation (USD 243 million). Over the same period, the top suppliers of processed timber products included China (USD 2.52 billion), Vietnam (USD 382 million), Italy (USD 146 million), and Germany (USD 101 million).

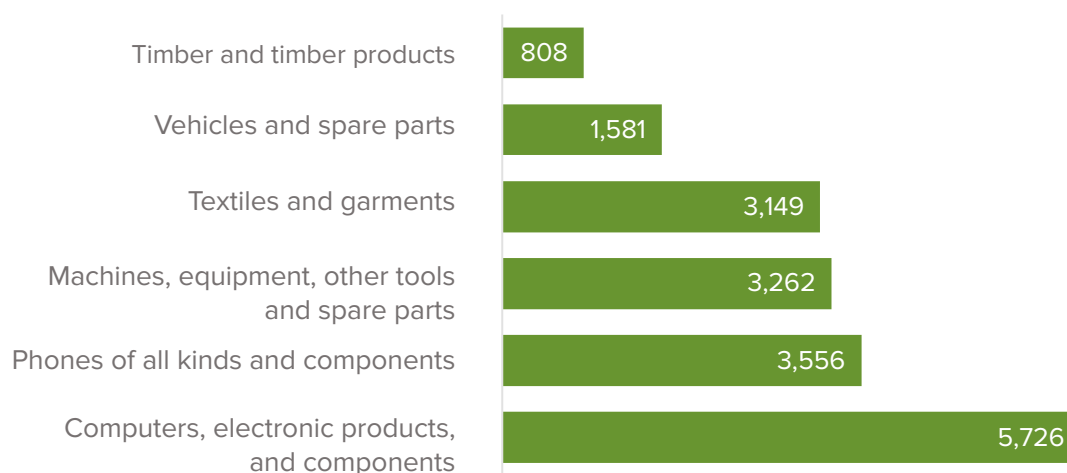
Figure 2. Major export markets for timber and timber products to South Korea in the first 11 months of 2024
(billion USD)



Source: Calculated by the International Trade Centre (ITC) based on statistics from the Korea Customs and Trade Development

In 2024, Vietnam's total export turnover to South Korea reached USD 25.6 billion, with five product categories exceeding USD 1 billion in value. Timber and timber products ranked sixth, with an export value of USD 808 million.

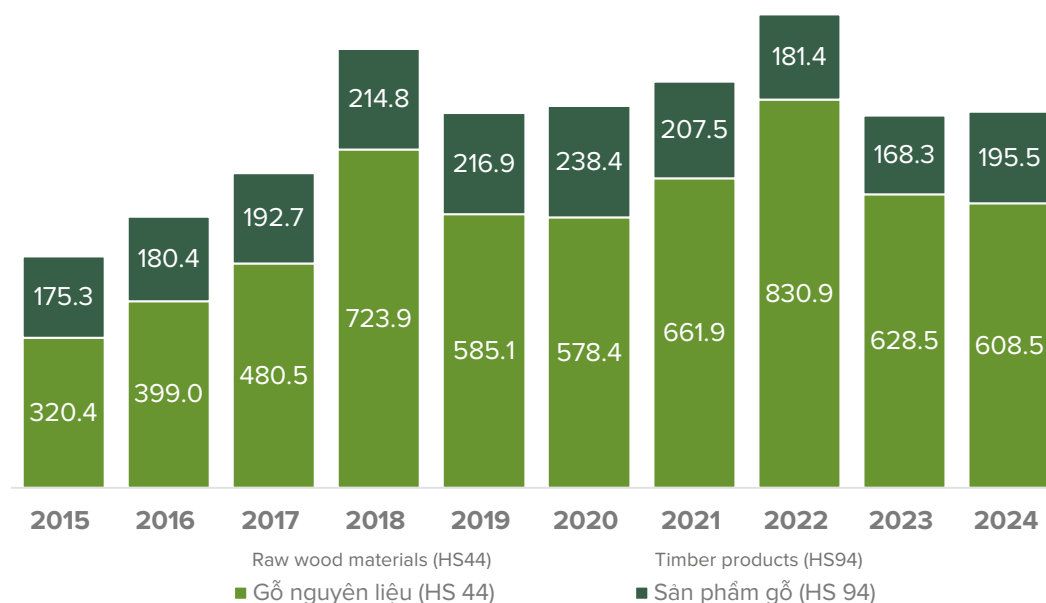
Figure 3. Top 6 products with the largest export value from Vietnam to Korea in 2024 (million USD)



Source: Compiled from Vietnam Customs data

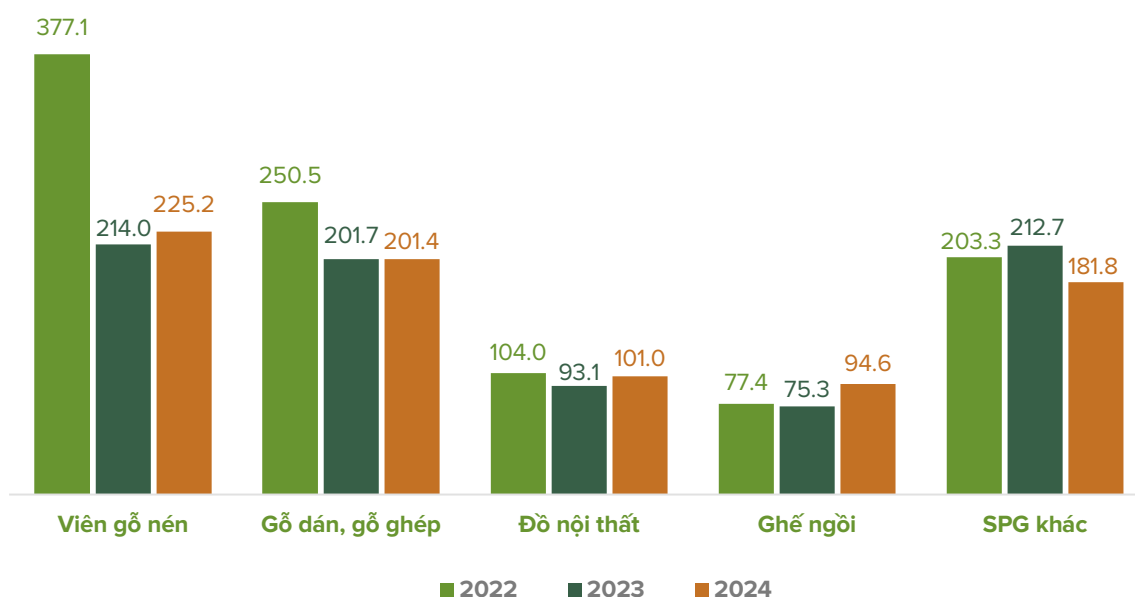
According to the Vietnam Timber and Forest Product Association (Viforest), the total import value of timber and timber products from Vietnam to South Korea between 2015 and 2024 has exhibited relatively stable growth. The peak was recorded in 2022 (exceeding USD 1 billion), followed by a decline to USD 804 million in 2024 (Figure 4). Data on timber and timber product exports from Vietnam to South Korea from 2022 to 2024 indicate that wood pellets, plywood, laminated timber, and furniture are the highest-value export items, with wood pellet exports demonstrating notable stability (Figure 5 and Appendix 1).

Figure 4. Export value of wood and wood products from Vietnam to South Korea, 2015–2024 (million USD)



Source: Viforest, compiled from Vietnam Customs data

Figure 5. Export value of key timber products from Vietnam to South Korea, 2022-2024 (million USD)



Source: Viforest, compiled from Vietnam Customs data

2. Key South Korean legislation in the forestry sector

2.1. Act on the Sustainable Use of Timbers

On May 23, 2012, South Korea enacted the *Act on the Sustainable Use of Timbers*. Since 2018, the country has implemented regulations to combat illegal timber harvesting and related commercial activities, promoting trade in legally sourced timber products. To date, this Act has undergone eight amendments², mandating compliance with legality requirements for both imported and domestically

²Act on the sustainable use of timber ([link](#))

produced timber and timber products. Timber that cannot be verified as legal is prohibited from sale in South Korea and must either be returned to its country of origin or destroyed, with penalties including fines or imprisonment for non-compliance.

Key provisions of the Act include³:

- Definition of illegal timber: Timber is deemed illegal if harvested in violation of South Korean laws and/or the laws of the country of origin.
- Country of origin: Importers are required to submit documentation proving that the timber was harvested in accordance with the laws of its country of origin.
- Corruption: The Korea Forest Service may request verification from the issuing country to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of documents submitted as part of import declarations.
- Regulated timber products:

1. Roundwood (HS4403)
2. Sawn timber (HS4407)
3. Preservative-treated timber (HS4407)
4. Fire-resistant treated wood (HS4407)
5. Laminate wood (HS4407)
6. Plywood (HS4412)
7. Wood pellets (HS4401-31)

Note: Pulp and paper products are excluded.

- Operators: The Act mandates that timber producers strive to import, distribute, produce, and sell legally harvested timber or timber products. Operators' primary obligation is to submit import declarations with evidence proving the legality of the imported timber or products. "Timber-producing enterprises" include those involved in logging, sawing, or distributing standing timber or bamboo, as defined under the Creation and Management of Forest Resources Act. This encompasses businesses engaged in the production, processing, importation, and distribution of timber and timber products.
- Traders: Timber-producing enterprises must maintain records detailing the type and volume of distributed timber, along with documentation verifying its legal harvest, retained for five years.
- Inspection of operator documentation: The Korea Forestry Promotion Institute, or an agency/organization designated by the Korea Forest Service, inspects documents submitted by operators as part of import declarations.

Upon verification by the Korea Forest Service that the timber and timber products comply with legal requirements, Korea Customs will authorize their import clearance

- Penalties for non-compliance: Penalties range from revocation of business registration to fines and imprisonment. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for up to three years or a fine of up to KRW 30 million (approximately EUR 30,000). The Korea Forest Service may suspend the sale of unverified timber or products and order their return or destruction.
- Due Diligence Obligation: Timber-producing entities are required to make reasonable efforts to ensure that imported, distributed, produced, or sold timber and products are legally harvested.

³A Comparison between South Korea's Act on the Sustainable Use of Timbers and the EUTR ([link](#))

- Due Diligence System:

Access to information: The Korea Forest Service has issued detailed standards for verifying the legality of imported timber, including:

- Harvesting permits issued by the country of origin.
 - Certificates from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), PEFC-endorsed programs, or systems compliant with ISO 17065.
 - Documents or certificates recognized by the Korea Forest Service.
 - FLEGT licenses or export permits verifying legality.
 - Risk assessment: The Korea Forest Service conducts risk assessments to verify the legality of imported timber, potentially requiring the issuing country to confirm document authenticity.
 - Risk mitigation: The Korea Forest Service provides importers with information on high-risk areas based on legality assessments. Failure to take additional action may result in goods being denied clearance.
 - CITES certification and FLEGT licensing: Timber with FLEGT licenses is recognized as legally harvested. The *Wildlife Protection and Management Act* requires individuals intending to import/export globally endangered species or their products to obtain permission from the Minister of Environment.
 - Third-party certification status: Certificates from FSC, PEFC, PEFC-endorsed programs, or ISO 17065-compliant systems are accepted as evidence of legality.
- Information exchange and dissemination: As of October 2018, 42 country-specific guidelines were available on the Korea Forest Service website.
 - Promotion: Local governments are tasked with developing and implementing measures to promote a culture of timber use and education, ensuring a stable supply of timber products.

2.2 . Creation and Management of Forest Resources Act⁴

Enacted on August 8, 2005, the *Creation and Management of Forest Resources Act* has undergone 17 amendments.

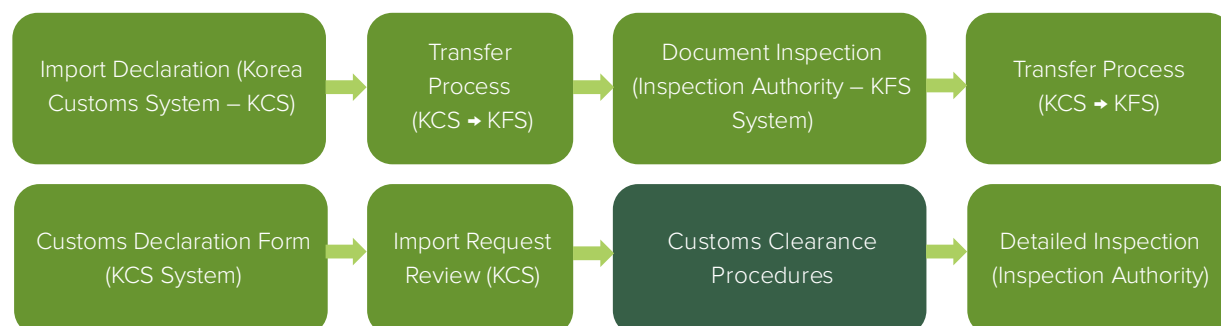
- Purpose: To preserve national land, support economic development, and enhance citizens' quality of life by ensuring forests' diverse functions and promoting their sustainable conservation and use.
- Forest classification: Forests are categorized as state-owned national forests, locally owned public forests, and privately owned forests.
- Key emphases: Sustainable forest management; functional forest classification; reforestation of degraded areas; forest management planning; registration of seed and seedling producers; designation and management of seed-producing forests; urban forest development; forest resource research and technology development; biodiversity conservation and sustainable use; protective forest designation; special forest protection zones; wildfire prevention; establishment of a Green Fund; climate change impact assessments on forests; and criminal provisions.

⁴*Creation And Management Of Forest Resources Act* ([link](#))

3. Standards and Regulations for timber and timber products imported into South Korea

South Korea is the first East Asian country to establish legal requirements regulating the legality of timber and timber products through the *Act on the Sustainable Use of Timbers*.

Figure 6. Inspection process of imported wood products of Korea



Source: Korea Forest Service⁵

According to the Korea Forest Service and the Japan Wood Products Export Association, key standards and regulations include:

3.1. Plant quarantine

Scope: Sawn timber (HS 4407), plywood (HS 4412), densified timber (HS 4413).

Importers of plants, containers, or packaging materials must submit a phytosanitary certificate. Exceptions include processed timber or bamboo, heat-treated or chemically treated products, which are exempt from quarantine requirements. The Act prohibits importing plants or timber from the *Pinus* genus (e.g., pine and Japanese larch) due to pest and disease risks, though processed items may be eligible for quarantine inspection under Form No. 4 of the Enforcement Rules of the Plant Protection Act.

3.2. Legality Documentation

Harvesting permits issued under the laws of the country of origin.

Internationally recognized certificates verifying legal harvesting, including:

- FSC or PEFC Forest Management or Chain of Custody certificates.
- Certificates under mutual recognition with PEFC-partnered countries.
- Certificates from international biomass sustainability verification systems (e.g., third-party certificates under ISO 17065).

Documents mutually recognized through bilateral consultations between South Korea and the country of origin, or any other documentation verifying legal harvesting and trade.

Table 1. Regulated imported timber products in South Korea

Item	HS Code	Note
1. Wood pellets	4401.31	
2. Round wood	4403	
3. Sawn timber	4407	Includes preservative-treated, fire-retardant-treated, or laminated timber

⁵Legal Timber Trade - Import Inspection Operation ([link](#))

Item	HS Code	Note
4. Veneer	4408	
5. Laminated wood	4409	
6. Particle board	4410	
7. Fiberboard	4411	
8. Plywood	4412	
9. Pulp	4701, 4702, 4703, 4704, 4705	

Source: Korea Forest Service

3.3 . Import declaration

Scope: Sawn timber (HS 4407), plywood (HS 4412), densified timber (HS 4413)

Requirements: Under the *Act on the Sustainable Use of Timbers*, importers must submit an import declaration to the Director General of the Korea Forest Service for timber or products intended for sale or commercial use. Documentation proving legality must accompany the declaration (include one of the designated documents specified in the *Detailed criteria for determining the legality of harvested timber/imported timber products*), submitted via the UNI-PASS electronic customs system. Upon satisfactory review, a certificate of import declaration is issued. Customs clearance requires submission of these documents to the Director General of the Korea Customs Service. If legality cannot be verified within 30 days post-clearance, sales and transport are prohibited until certification is obtained.

Required Documents:

- Import declaration form
- Bill/Invoice
- Packing list
- Bill of lading
- Certificate of Origin
- Phytosanitary certificate (if applicable)
- Other legality verification documents

3.4 . Customs duties

Scope: Sawn timber (HS 4407), plywood (HS 4412), densified timber (HS 4413).

Tariff Rates: Per the Korea Tariff Schedule: HS 4407 (5%), HS 4412 (8%), HS 4413 (8%).

RCEP Benefits: Under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (effective January 1, 2022), tariffs on HS 4407 and HS 4412 imports from signatory countries, including Vietnam, are subject to phased reductions.

4. Recommendations

The South Korean timber and timber products market has experienced robust growth, with Vietnam as the leading supplier, accounting for a significant share of total imports. South Korea has established a stringent legal framework to manage forest resources and ensure timber legality, particularly through the *Act on the Sustainable Use of Timbers*, which imposes rigorous requirements on importers to prove the legal origin of timber. To meet these standards, stakeholders in Vietnam should pursue initiatives to enhance bilateral information exchange and cooperation, fostering a sustainable timber supply chain from Vietnam to South Korea.

Vietnamese government agencies

- Establish mechanisms for dialogue with the Korea Forest Service regarding South Korea's legal requirements and specific guidelines for imported timber and products.
- Disseminate information on South Korea's legal standards to timber associations and enterprises.

- Guide local authorities in issuing certifications verifying legal timber harvesting in accordance with Vietnamese laws.

Timber association

- Organize forums to facilitate information sharing between Vietnamese exporters and South Korean timber associations and businesses, clarifying governmental and commercial requirements.
- Develop a handbook outlining compliance with South Korean regulations, distributing it to domestic timber enterprises, particularly exporters.

Exporting enterprises

- Proactively gather evidence proving timber is legally harvested under Vietnamese law.
- Develop supply chain mapping and risk management systems to minimize legality-related risks.
- Regularly consult with South Korean importing partners to stay updated on legal requirements for timber and products from Vietnam.

Appendix

**Appendix . Export Value of Timber and Timber Product Categories
from Vietnam to South Korea, 2020-2024 (USD)**

Product Category	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Wood pellets	193,457,090	212,045,543	377,136,572	213,968,409	225,228,272
Plywood, laminated wood	214,215,602	258,565,122	250,498,564	201,748,236	201,449,845
Furniture	154,098,589	131,810,284	104,027,565	93,083,580	100,963,190
Chairs	84,278,286	75,643,493	77,419,684	75,258,716	94,566,770
Wood chips	54,949,678	63,087,230	92,856,038	91,877,966	84,067,083
Plywood, construction timber (m ³)	37,034,233	35,217,379	24,295,044	23,587,383	20,598,013
Wood fiber; pulp (ton)	7,349,251	5,684,278	6,516,831	5,631,349	5,486,157
Other products	71,358,656	87,307,158	79,642,049	91,652,159	71,696,125
Total export value	816,741,385	869,360,487	1,012,392,345	796,807,797	804,055,456

Source: Viforest, compiled from Vietnam Customs data

Appendix 2. List of Korean laws and decrees in the forestry sector

Content	Original Issuance Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Latest Amendment Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Framework Act on Forestry	5/24/2001	12/27/2022
Creation and Management of Forest Resources Act	8/4/2005	6/10/2022
Forest Protection Act	6/9/2009	12/27/2022
Act on the Conservation and Use of Natural Heritage.	3/21/2023	8/16/2023
Act on Creation and Management of Urban Forests	6/9/2020	

Act on Promotion and Management of Forestry Technology	11/28/2017	3/28/2023
Act on Promotion of Forest Welfare	3/27/2015	12/27/2022
Act on the Sustainable Use of Timbers	5/23/2012	2/28/2020
Act on Management and Improvement of Carbon Sinks	2/22/2012	5/29/2016
Act on Promotion of Forestry Education	7/25/2011	6/15/2021
Special Act on the Management of Northern Mountainous Counties for Civilian Control	4/4/2011	3/31/2020
Act on the Management and Administration of State Forestry	8/4/2005	6/15/2021
Act on the Management and Administration of National Forests	8/4/2005	4/11/2007
Act on Forestry Culture and Recreation	8/4/2005	6/10/2022
Special Act for the Eradication of Pine Wilt Disease.	5/31/2005	1/15/2019
Standing Timber Act (No. 2484 of February 6, 1973).	2/6/1973	2/10/2012
Act on the Establishment and Development of Arboreturns and Botanical Gardens		4/13/2021
Arrangement of Personnel Assigned to the Special Forest Protection Act		3/23/2013
Enforcement Rules of the Act on the Conservation and Use of Natural Heritage	6/14/2024	1/1/1900
Enforcement Decree of the Act on the Sustainable Use of Timbers	3/6/2018	1/1/1900
Enforcement Decree of the Act on Access to and Utilization of Genetic Resources and Benefit-Sharing	8/16/2017	12/18/2018
Enforcement Decree of the Act on the Promotion of Forest Welfare	3/25/2016	12/31/2018
Enforcement Decree of the Forest Protection Act	3/9/2010	11/15/2022
Enforcement Decree of the Act on Forestry Culture and Recreation	8/4/2006	7/9/2019
Enforcement Decree of the Act on the Creation and Management of Forest Resources	8/4/2006	7/9/2019
Enforcement Decree of the Special Act on the Eradication of Pine Wilt Disease	9/14/2005	7/16/2019
Enforcement Decree of the Baekdu-Daegan Protection Act	12/30/2004	7/2/2019
Enforcement Decree of the Natural Parks Act, 2001 (Presidential Decree No. 17380)	9/29/2001	3/13/2018
Decree on the Promotion of Forestry and Mountain Village Development	4/11/2007	6/10/2022

Source: FAO⁶

References

Briefing - A comparison between South Korea's Act on the Sustainable Use of Timbers and the EUTR

Forest Trends 2019, *Regulating the Trade in Illegal Timber: Republic of Korea Update - State of Play October 2018*

With support from David and Lucile Packard Foundation



⁶FAOLEX Database - Republic of Korea Forestry ([link](#))