

# Certification of timber might boost exports, forestry experts say

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**T**IMBER exports from Southeast Asia to Europe are on the decline, a trend that could be exacerbated by the tightening of European Union import regulations and the lack of an effective certification system in Southeast Asia, forestry experts said Wednesday.

A primary factor contributing to the decline is the lack of a mechanism in place to track timber in countries such as Cambodia, said Vincent van der Berk, programme attache for EU Forest Law Enforcement, Government and Trade Asia, which aims to strengthen regional cooperation to address illegal logging and related trade.

"Customers want verified guarantees, and at least legality, when they buy timber," van der Berk said during his speech at a forest policy conference that brought together officials from Asia and the European Union.

"Imported and tropical timber in particular are considered trouble," he added, emphasising that Southeast Asian wood exports need to "meet due diligence requirements".

In order to effectively track timber products, and thereby assure customers that imported wood is legal, Cambodia and other countries in the region should establish a system overseen by a third-party auditor, said Kerstin Canby, director of the Forest Trade and Finance Programme for the US-based organisation Forest Trends.

"For wood sourced in Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, we do not know where the wood ultimately is consumed," she added.

On Tuesday, the first day of the conference, Timo Makela, director of the European Commission's directorate general of environment, said the EU would soon finalise a system for certifying the legality of timber imports, which he said would "lead to bans" on wood products that do not meet certification requirements.

Maharaj Muthoo, president of the Roman Forum, an independent environmental think-tank based in Italy, called for the creation of an independent international agency "to monitor forestry and make sure the aims and ambitions we discussed today are delivered".

Eang Savet, chief of the Forestry Administration's Mekong Inspectorate, said international support would be crucial in the fight against illegal logging.

"If the policy makers do not [offer] support," he said, "how can the forestry officials fight the illegal loggers?"

