

The Deforestation Communication

A citizens' summary

What is the problem?

Deforestation is the permanent destruction of forests and woodlands. While the phenomenon is not new, the current scale and pace of destruction is alarming. Tropical forests are disappearing at a rate of about 13 million hectares per year – an area greater than all of Germany's forests. This magnitude of destruction has an impact not only at a local level, but also globally. Tropical forests are home to much of the planet's biodiversity, hosting about half of all known species. Cutting down forests not only threatens the extinction of a diverse range of plants and animals, but also causes climate disruption: deforestation is responsible for around 20% of global CO₂ emissions, making it a major contributor to climate change. Together with forest degradation, it also poses a threat to the cultural integrity and way of life of people dependent on forests for their livelihood. The process continues as alternative land uses usually bring increased economic revenues in the short term, and this is why the deforestation rate remains so high in many countries.

Uncertain ownership rights, complex regulations and weak law enforcement can all favour the conversion of forests to other uses such as agriculture. But this substantial loss of tropical forests can be curbed or even reversed through improved land-use planning, better governance, targeted financial support, political will at national and international level and support from local governments and communities.

What is Europe doing to address the problem of deforestation?

In its Communication "Addressing the challenge of deforestation and forest degradation to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss", the Commission proposes an objective of halting global forest cover loss by 2030 at the latest and reducing gross tropical deforestation by at least 50% by 2020. This will be pursued in the context of the international negotiations on the post-2012 climate change agreement.

Increasing public awareness and a global acknowledgement of the need to tackle climate change, including emissions from deforestation and land degradation in developing countries, indicate that the time has come for new policy proposals. These proposals will enable the European Union to contribute to efforts to reduce such emissions, and to other global policy goals, in particular poverty alleviation and the conservation of biodiversity.

How will this be achieved?

The Communication recognises that existing EU policies aimed at directly and indirectly reducing tropical deforestation need to be reinforced. In addition, international incentives will be needed to guarantee the protection and sustainable management of tropical forest resources. To this end the Communication proposes that a portion of revenues from the

auctioning of emissions trading allowances be used as part of a new Global Forest Carbon Mechanism. The Communication also suggests that in the medium to long term and under certain conditions, resources to address deforestation could be made available through carbon markets.

What happens next?

The Commission will organise a conference in 2009 to engage all stakeholders in the debate on how to combat deforestation and will work with Member States to establish a Global Forest Carbon Mechanism at the UN climate conference in Copenhagen at the end of next year.