

This is an archived document. For the most recent guidance on the UK Government's Timber Procurement Policy, see: www.cpet.org.uk

1. Summary

The UK Government's timber procurement policy was introduced in the summer of 2000, and has since developed into an internationally recognised policy tool.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is responsible for development and implementation of the policy.

Central departments, executive agencies and non departmental public bodies must actively seek to purchase legal and sustainable timber

Policy success to date can be attributed to:

- Strong political commitment
- Continued support from private sector
- A dedicated Central Point for Expertise on Timber procurement (CPET)
- Development of practical tools and clear guidance on evidence of compliance)

The influence of the policy goes beyond government procurement, raising awareness and changing the way suppliers procure for public and private clients alike. On an even broader scale, the policy has positively influenced forest certification schemes, which are used as a global tool to provide assurance of sustainable forest management.

The policy has built the UK's reputation as a sustainability leader, demonstrating a commitment domestically and internationally to addressing illegal logging, and supporting sustainable forest management.

2. How it began

At the G8 summit in July 2000, in response to growing concerns surrounding deforestation and illegal logging, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair pledged that the UK Government would take action to tackle trade in illegally harvested timber. Subsequently, the Environment Minister made a statement that Government would "actively seek to buy timber and timber products from sustainable and legal sources", laying the foundations for the UK Government procurement policy on timber.

Following the announcement of the policy, a consultation

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exercise was carried out and a report produced in 2002, setting out a wide range of suggestions and options for implementation. A joint guidance document was then produced by the Office of Government Commerce and Defra (the lead on implementation of green procurement). Heads of Procurement within all Government Departments were notified, and an internal Timber Buyers Group formed to develop the policy and support implementation.

3. Success of the policy

While challenges remain, overall implementation of the policy has been successful – awareness of the importance of buying legal and sustainable timber has increased, and this has prompted market changes. There are a number of key factors that contributed to this success:

The timber procurement policy within a wider context:

EU Green Procurement Policy: The EU has had an interest in 'green procurement' for several years, and discussions on common criteria across Europe, including for timber, are expected.

FLEGT: The EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade initiative specifically recognises the importance of procurement policy in tackling illegal logging. Timber licensed under FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements will be accepted under the policy.

Climate change and forests: With the renewed recognition of the role that forests play in global climate change, reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) is now becoming an important topic; efforts to tackle deforestation and illegal logging can be supported by a robust timber procurement policy.

Stakeholders

Establishment of the Reference Board has been an important contribution to the implementation. This is a small group made up of trade, NGO and other Government department representatives which meets regularly to discuss issues related to the policy and its implementation.

The Reference Board acts in an advisory capacity to Defra but does not have any decision-making powers. It has been involved in all the key discussions and developments related to the policy.

Strong political support: from its inception, the UK timber procurement policy has had consistent support from Ministers. Strong public concern for forests has also ensured a high level of scrutiny.

Support from the trade: many within the UK trade have responded very positively to the procurement policy. Companies ranging from timber importers and furniture suppliers to the large-scale construction industry have developed and implemented internal policies designed to deliver UK government requirements, making policy implementation much more practical for government procurement officers.

The Central Point of Expertise on Timber procurement (CPET): a unique feature of the UK procurement policy is the existence of a dedicated support unit providing practical information and advice to government buyers and their suppliers. CPET was proposed in the 2002 report and initially formed in 2004, becoming fully operational in 2005. CPET services are provided through a contract with ProForest; an international resource management consultancy. CPET services include a website (www.proforest.net/cpet), a helpline, training and capacity building, development of practical tools and monitoring of implementation.

4. Positive impacts

Influence on certification schemes: The initial assessment of forest certification schemes found that three schemes were not fully compliant with UK government criteria for sustainability. As a result, two of the schemes made changes to their systems and subsequently met the require-

ments. In raising the bar and encouraging private certification schemes to strengthen their requirements, other consumers have begun to procure certified wood produced to higher standards by virtue of the government's influence.

Influence on the purchase of certified timber: The private sector has looked to Government to lead by example. Some increased demand for certified timber has been reported anecdotally by the trade.

Legality schemes: The UK timber policy states a preference for timber from sustainable sources but also accepts timber from legal sources. This has encouraged the development of various schemes and initiatives which recognise and promote legal timber.

Harmonisation: The UK, the Netherlands and Denmark have been working to promote voluntary harmonisation of their timber procurement policies, which has sent a strong signal to the timber trade operating in several countries and increased the incentive to develop and implement strategies to meet the policy requirements.

5. Overview of the policy

5.1 The policy requirements

The current policy states that the UK Government will actively seek to procure legal and sustainable timber. This has been further elaborated in the UK Government's Timber Procurement Advice Note initially developed in 2004 and revised in 2005, with recommended contract clauses to allow the policy to be integrated easily into supply con-



Case study: Implementation in the construction sector

A good example of implementation was demonstrated at a Government project in Alnwick, visited by CPET as part of a Construction Sector Study. Both Defra project managers and their contractors had agreed site controls through an implemented chain of custody process. All timber purchases were checked and recorded to ensure compliance with the policy.

The Alnwick project was part of a wider study included examining how the public bodies implemented the policy, what procedures were used on sites and how monitoring and reporting could be improved to collect data.

The study indicated that whilst timber is not a major priority for many projects, successful implementation was often linked with environmental assessments of the construction project such as BREEAM¹, or the construction company themselves operating their own timber policy.

¹ BRE Environmental Assessment Method for assessing the environmental performance of a new build or refurbishments

tracts. The Advice Note is available for download on the CPET website, www.proforest.net/CPET.

5.2 Criteria to define legal and sustainable

Under public procurement rules, product requirements must be defined and measurable. Detailed criteria to define legality and sustainability have been developed and form part of the contract requirements.

Legality: Criteria for legality were outlined in the consultation document developed in 2002 and subsequently revised to bring the criteria closer to the requirements of other EU countries and with FLEGT requirements.

Sustainability: Elaborated through the development of criteria for assessing certification schemes in 2005, these are drawn from internationally agreed overall criteria for sustainable forest management such as the Helsinki Guidelines and the Rio Principles. They cover responsible production, environmental protection and biodiversity.

5.3 Evidence of compliance with the policy

Suppliers are required to provide evidence of compliance if requested, and the Government has identified two ways of doing this:

Category A evidence: A set of criteria were developed to set out the key attributes of a forest certification scheme, providing adequate evidence to meet UK requirements. So far five certification schemes have been assessed against these criteria (see below).

Category B evidence: To meet EU procurement regulations, evidence equivalent to forest certification must be accepted. This 'equivalent' evidence is termed 'Category B', which is any type of evidence (e.g. official documentation, independent audit reports and declarations) which is adequate to meet the UK criteria.

6. Practical tools and guidance

CPET has produced guidance and a series of practical tools to facilitate implementation of the policy. These include criteria for Evaluating Certification Schemes, (Category A Evidence) and for evaluating Category B Evidence.

Practical guides for Category B evidence include Supply chain information and Forest source information (covering legality and sustainability). These guides support a series of checklists associated with the guides, to be used when preparing and submitting evidence of compliance with the policy.

Criteria for legality

Organisation that fells trees shall:

- Have legal use right to the forest
- Comply with all local and national laws relevant to forest operation, environment, labour, health and safety and tenure rights
- Pay all relevant royalties and taxes
- Respect CITES requirements

Criteria for sustainability

Organisation that fells trees shall:

- Use a locally applicable definition of sustainability, which has been developed in accordance with the UK's requirements
- Use a definition of sustainable forest management which:
 - Minimises harm to ecosystems
 - Maintains forest productivity
 - Ensures forest ecosystem health and vitality
 - Maintains biodiversity



Who does the policy apply to?

The policy is mandatory for all Central departments, executive agencies and non departmental public bodies.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have devolved responsibility for sustainable development. However, all three devolved administrations have adopted the policy, making it mandatory throughout.

Local authorities: Local authorities are not mandated by the central government policy. Instead, there is a process of awareness-raising to encourage local authorities to voluntarily adopt and implement the policy.

In addition, the CPET website provides detailed information and guidance on implementation in practice, evidence of compliance, technical methodology, international policies and reviews currently underway.

CPET runs workshops on a monthly basis for procurement personnel and suppliers, providing practical information and advice on implementation. A helpline is also available during business hours, by e-mail cpet@proforest.net and telephone +44(0)1865 243766.



7. Future challenges

Implementation and monitoring: Anecdotal evidence from the timber trade and concerns raised by NGOs (including specific actions related to particular projects) suggests that implementation of the policy is still not universal. This was raised by the parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee in 2006 which also highlighted that there was a lack of reliable data on timber procurement with which to assess the extent of implementation.

CPET was commissioned in 2006 to assess the implementation of the policy and completed a Construction Sector Study throughout 2007.

Review of certification schemes: In 2004 CPET undertook a review of major certification schemes against the Government's criteria, as potential evidence of compliance with the policy. The review was based on requirements, and currently all schemes are accepted as evidence of either legal or sustainable timber. The schemes are reviewed biennially to ensure continued compliance with the criteria. For the next review in 2008 a Technical Panel will be established made up of recognised forestry experts, to oversee

the assessments. The panel will act in an advisory capacity and all final decisions will be made by Defra.

Uptake of the policy by non-mandated bodies: Government currently estimates that they are responsible for approximately 10% of timber purchases within the UK. Coupled with other public sector bodies this figure is believed to rise to around 40%. Therefore, a key target for implementation, strongly supported by Ministers, is to encourage the other non-mandated public bodies, particularly local authorities, to adopt the policy. Some local authorities in England have voluntarily adopted policies to procure timber from well-managed forests, but extending this to a greater number is now a key target.

8. Next steps

Revision of the policy: A revision to the new policy was announced in the UK Government Sustainable Procurement Action Plan published early 2007;

"From 1 April 2009 only timber and timber products originating either from independently verified legal and sustainable sources or from a licensed FLEGT partner will be demanded for use on the Government estate – appropriate documentation will be required to prove it. From 1 April 2015, only legal and sustainable timber would be demanded."

A formal consultation was carried out by CPET in order to collect feedback from a range of stakeholders on the implementation of the revised policy. This information has been collated and considered by the CPET Reference Board and will be used in the formulation of a new Timber Guidance Note.

Social Criteria: Currently, criteria relating to social aspects of sustainable forest management, (including clarification, recognition and respect of legal customary and traditional rights related to the forest, mechanisms for dispute resolution between forest management and local people and freedom to organise and negotiate) are not included in the criteria for sustainability. When the policy was first developed, it was the UK government's understanding that social criteria were not directly relevant to the subject matter of procurement contracts. However, some other EU member states have included social criteria, and there is now an on-going process to seek clarification from the European Commission.

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Further information:

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website: www.defra.gov.uk

The Central Point for Expertise on Timber Procurement

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