

HOW 'GREEN' IS YOUR FLOOR?

A GUIDE TO BUYING WOOD FLOORING MADE FROM TIMBER HARVESTED IN A LEGAL AND SUSTAINABLE MANNER

The darker shades of exotic hardwoods are the new fashion in flooring and manufacturing companies are turning to tropical countries to satisfy consumer demand.

One of the more popular species used for flooring is merbau. This species, a valuable hardwood only commercially available in Indonesia's Papua Province and the neighbouring country of Papua New Guinea, is being ruthlessly targeted by illegal loggers to supply the demand from the booming western flooring markets.

This guide is for consumers who do not want to buy flooring that is linked to illegal logging. It is for consumers who want to be sure that the wood flooring they buy is made from timber harvested in a legal and sustainable manner. It also provides some information about illegal logging and highlights the tactics used by flooring companies to mislead consumers while selling them flooring made from timber with dubious origins. The guide is focused on merbau, but it applies to all species used for flooring.

ILLEGAL LOGGING – THE ISSUE

Illegal and unsustainable logging is a huge problem around the world, particularly in tropical countries with corrupt governments. It often involves intimidation and exploitation of local communities, and the destruction of natural habitat – leading to loss of species, landslides and even the loss of human life.

Much of this destructive activity is driven by demand for cheap timber from the massive global timber trade. The flooring trade is a particularly strong market, with huge volumes of illegal timber going into hardwood flooring.

Incredibly, there is no law banning the import of illegal timber. So until such time as governments of western consuming countries stop stolen timber from reaching the shelves, the only incentive for companies to stop using illegal timber is if consumers refuse to buy it.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- **Do not trust environmental claims associated with wood flooring unless they can be backed up.**
- **Only buy wood flooring that has been independently verified as legally sourced, such as flooring sold under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) scheme.**
- **Do not buy merbau flooring until such time as it can be supplied with evidence of its legal origins.**

The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and Telapak conducted an investigation into the global merbau flooring trade, the results of which are documented in the report 'Behind the Veneer'. For more information on this and how to buy 'green' wood, please visit: www.eia-international.org www.telapak.org



HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- **Do not trust environmental claims associated with wood flooring unless they can be backed up**
Many of the biggest wood flooring brand manufacturers and retailers sell flooring made from illegally sourced wood. The environmental claims associated with this flooring are often designed to mislead consumers or are blatantly untrue. For example:

Claim: To only buy legal and sustainable wood.

Reality: Many manufacturers and retailers use this claim to assuage consumer concerns, but seldom have any real evidence to back it up.

Claim: To replant trees or replace what they have used.

Reality: Most companies which make such claims cannot know if they are true as they do not actually know where the timber they are using was cut. The only trees which are actively planted are those in monoculture plantations, not natural forests. Most logging in tropical countries is the first step towards forest clearance.

Claim: To only use timber which is 'selectively felled' in 'sustainably managed' forests

Reality: Such claims imply knowledge of precisely where trees were cut – though it is true that high value trees are often 'selected' to be cut first, the truth is that few companies have any idea of where exactly their timber originates.

Consumers should not trust any environmental claims from retailers or manufacturers about the legality or sustainability of wood flooring, unless these can be backed up by independent verification, such as those provided by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

If the claims are true, the companies should be happy to provide proof. If they are unable to, consumers should try somewhere else, and tell the manager or shop owner why.

- **Only buy wood flooring verified by credible assessors**
Consumers should only buy flooring that has been independently verified as legally sourced, such as wood sold under the FSC scheme, which provides a full 'chain of custody' tracking timber from forest to shelf. The FSC scheme certifies forests and wood, ensuring that the trees are cut in a legal and sustainable manner with respect for the rights of local people. For timber to be properly certified the FSC logo must appear on the timber or wood product AND the letters 'FSC' appear next to the product name on the receipt.

FSC is the only certification standard supported by EIA at this time and by other groups working on forest issues. For more info, visit www.fsc.org/en/.

- **Do not buy merbau flooring until such time as it can be supplied with evidence of its legal origins**
Many of the world's biggest flooring companies source their merbau from Papua, where illegal logging, official corruption and smuggling characterise virtually all timber production. These companies do not check that the merbau they use comes from legal sources. Until they do and can provide evidence of its legal origins, consumers are advised not to buy it.

Note: There is currently no merbau certified by the FSC scheme. If supplies of merbau which have been audited by credible, independent assessors become available in future, EIA will provide information on its website.
