

Australia boosts illegal logging fight as summit starts

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Environmental activists are seen uncovering an illegal wood-cutting site at the Trairao Amazonic forest reserve in northern Brazil, on December 4, 2011

Australia on Tuesday pledged Aus\$6 million (US\$5.2 million) to the fight against illegal logging as top officials and conservationists met in Sydney for the Asia-Pacific Rainforest Summit.

The two-day forum, being held ahead of the once-a-decade World Parks

Congress that begins Wednesday, was set up by the Australian government as part of an election pledge to help countries reduce rainforest loss and cut global [greenhouse gas emissions](#).

"Deforestation is one of the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions," Australia's Environment Minister Greg Hunt said at the summit's launch.

"With the Asia-Pacific region home to 6.2 percent of the world's forests, reducing forest loss can make a big difference to reducing [global carbon emissions](#)," he said.

The newly unveiled funds will support the third phase of the Responsible Asia Forestry and Trade programme.

The programme was established to help nations practice accountable forest management and involves environmental organisations such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Nature Conservancy and TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network.

Hunt also launched a new online tool to aid countries in developing a national forestry monitoring system. Such systems are sometimes prerequisites for nations wanting to take part in international agreements such as REDD Plus, a forestry protection scheme.

The minister said deforestation and forest degradation were growing problems for the region and were leading to the loss of biodiversity as well as government revenues and communities' livelihoods.



Forest is being cleared of trees on Indonesian part of Borneo Island, on February 24, 2014

"While reliable figures are obviously difficult to assess, I understand that around 30 to 40 percent of total wood-based exports in the Asia-Pacific were derived from illegal sources in 2010," Hunt said.

"This is a significant cost to national governments, local communities and the private sector and our natural ecosystems."

Activists led by WWF Australia welcomed the new summit and called on the Australian government to set up an Asia-Pacific Forests Fund.

"Illegal logging thrives on bribery and tax evasion," said the Uniting Church in a joint statement with WWF on the need to tackle deforestation.

"It cheats local communities out of their valuable natural resources. Often those involved in [illegal logging](#) operations are also involved in other serious criminal activity."

The organisations said the fund should provide Aus\$200 million (\$172 million) over the next four years to support measures such as sustainable forestry management, sustainable agriculture, species conservation and anti-corruption schemes.

The United Nations' climate summit in September launched the New York Declaration on Forests, which called on nations to cut the loss of forests in half by 2020, and to end it by 2030.

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