

Poland rejects EU evidence on primeval forest dispute

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This handout photo made available on August 31, 2017 by Greenpeace shows their activists hanging in trees to stop logging in Poland's Bialowieza Forest. A case is now in the European Court of Justice

Poland on Friday rejected evidence put before the European Court of Justice to prove illegal logging in the Bialowieza forest, a protected UNESCO site that includes Europe's last primeval woodland.

During a court hearing in Luxembourg on September 11, the European Commission's representative showed [satellite images](#) of Bialowieza to show that Warsaw is defying the court's temporary injunction to suspend logging there.

Poland has "found that the documents brought by the Commission have no value as evidence given their poor quality," the environment ministry said in a statement.

The satellite images are "imprecise and there's no way of verifying when and where they were taken, which calls into question their reliability", it added.

The ministry sent a version of the statement to the ECJ and maintained that it is obeying the injunction issued in July and is only felling trees for public safety reasons.

Poland has also requested that the court's vice-president Antonio Tizzano be removed from the case for allegedly taking sides at the last court session, ministry spokesman Aleksander Brzozka said, according to the Polish news agency PAP.

Bialowieza, which straddles the border with Belarus, includes one of the largest surviving parts of the primeval forest that covered the European plain 10 thousand years ago.

The vast woodland is home to unique plant and animal life, including 800 European bison, the continent's largest mammal.

The Polish government began logging in May last year, saying it was clearing dead trees to contain damage caused by a spruce bark beetle infestation, as well as to fight the risk of forest fires and preserve road traffic.

Scientists, ecologists and the European Union protested and activists now allege that it is being used as a cover for commercial [logging](#).

The ECJ is expected to give its final ruling in early October.

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