

Ban palm oil in biofuel to save forests, EU parliament told

Tuesday 27 February 2018, by [WATTS Jonathan](#) (Date first published: 23 February 2018).

Forest peoples affected by plantations urge EU to enact ban despite diplomatic opposition

If European nations are to fulfil forest protection goals, they must ban the use of palm oil for biofuel and tighten oversight of supply chains, a delegation of forest peoples told parliamentarians this week.

The call for urgent, concrete action comes amid an increasingly heated diplomatic row over the issue between the EU and the governments of major palm-producing nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Costa Rica.

The European parliament voted last April to prohibit sales of biofuels made from vegetable oils by 2020 in order to meet its climate goals. This was followed by a related vote last month. Whether and how this might be implemented is now being considered by the European Commission and member states.

The pushback has been strong, particularly in south-east Asia, the origin of 90% of the world's palm oil exports, which is used in hundreds of supermarket products. Palm oil can also be blended with diesel to power engines, which is what the ban would halt.

Influential politicians in these countries, many of whom are closely linked to the industry, accuse the EU of trade protectionism, colonial thinking and undermining poverty reduction efforts. Malaysia's plantations minister described the proposed ban as "crop apartheid."

But indigenous and other communities who are negatively affected by the plantations urge the EU to push ahead with the ban and to go further by tightening other supply chain controls to prevent damage to their land, rights and environment.

Franky Samperante, a founder of the indigenous peoples' organisation Pusaka, said the Indonesian government had granted concessions to more than 50 companies to open plantations on 1.2m hectares of land claimed by local communities. For him, any palm oil from this area should be considered a conflict product and prohibited from sale in Europe.

"There should be sanctions. If not, there is no point," he said.

Samperante is part of a group of 14 forest peoples representatives from 11 nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America visiting Europe this week to lobby for a new action plan on sustainable supply chains.

The delegation proposed concrete steps, including for European nations to establish sustainable trade ombudsmen to look into reports of human rights and environmental violations, and for companies to adopt binding human rights policies rather than voluntary actions. Their call was

supported by a coalition of environmental NGOs including the Forest People's Programme, Global Witness, Greenpeace, WWF and the Environmental Investigation Agency.

Tom Griffiths, the author of [a report on rights and deforestation](#), said lofty goals to protect forests were being undermined by a failure to protect the rights of those who live in them.

"There are so many pledges and commitments by companies and government that sound good on paper, but the reality on the ground is starkly different," he said. "At the meetings this we, they are all saying close the gap."

Their recommendations will be presented at a multilateral meeting in Paris in June, when the French president, Emmanuel Macron, is expected to launch his strategy for "deforestation-free trade".

Jonathan Watts

P.S.

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/feb/23/britain-and-europe-must-ban-palm-oil-in-biofuel-to-save-forests-eu-parliament-told>