The Danish Timber Trade Federation (DTTF), Le Commerce du Bois (LCB), AEIM and GD Holz all put forward Action Plans (AP) to the STTC, outlining proposed activities. These had to align with Coalition criteria for increasing certified sustainable material's share of the European tropical timber market.

They could range from encouraging implementation of private and public sector sustainable procurement policies and supporting use of lesser known tropical timber species (LKTS), to increasing tropical timber’s applications and marketability.

GD Holz has undertaken to provide straightforward explanations of the EU Timber Regulation and the EU FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement initiative, which combine to block illegal timber from the EU.

“Timber legality assurance is the first and most important element of sustainable sourcing,” said Head of Foreign Trade Nils Olaf Petersen. “It effectively paves the way to sourcing,” said Head of Foreign Trade Nils Olaf Petersen. “It effectively paves the way to sourcing,” said Head of Foreign Trade Nils Olaf Petersen.

The German federation also plans to demonstrate the diversity and versatility of tropical timber, including LKTS, with a special display at the Interzum furniture and interiors show among its projects.

It aims to tackle popular misconceptions about tropical timber too.

“It’s ambitious,” said Mr Petersen, “but to increase imports we need to improve tropical wood’s negative image.”

Director Jakob Rygg Klaumann said the DTTF plans to engage members to increase Danish imports of sustainably sourced tropical timber by 30% above 2015 levels by 2020. It will also develop tools for members to use in daily customer communication, underlining that ‘sustainably produced tropical timber is safe, versatile and readily available’.

“The STTC grant is important in our efforts to transform our current Code of Conduct [on sustainable sourcing] into purchasing policy,” said Mr Klaumann.

General Secretary Alberto Romero said AEIM’s Action Plan focus from 2017 to 2020 would be to ensure accuracy in tropical timber proof of origin and to develop guidance and support in securing evidence of legal and sustainable sourcing.

“It’s very important for the Spanish market, where certified tropical timber demand is still low,” said Mr Romero.

AEIM is also encouraging use of LKTS, while AEIM is also encouraging use of LKTS, while AEIM.

The Danish Conclave site creates powerful new online tool for over 40 years and was described by Fedustria as the ‘face of the organisation’.

Details of LCB’s Action Plan will be announced soon.
BFHI teams up with Fedustria

The Belgian Timber Importers Federation (BFHI) and Fedustria, the Belgian federation of textiles, wood and furniture industries, joined forces from the new year. At the same time, a new Wood Import group was formed within the latter’s Wood and Furniture section.

The BFHI membership comprised around 40 companies (importers and agents and associated businesses). Between them they turn over €450 million and employ 400 people.

Fedustria is a much larger body, formed in the 2007 merger of furniture, textile and wood federations, Febebois and Febeltex. “We’re the voice of an industry comprising 1,916 companies, with combined turnover of €11.2 billion and a 38,446-strong workforce,” said Fedustria Deputy General Manager Filip De Jaeger.

The incorporation of BTIF within Fedustria was requested by members. “The aim was to ensure continuation of their activities in an organisation capable of providing the required support,” said Mr de Jaeger. “Preliminary discussions also revealed that topics and issues relevant to wood importers were covered by Fedustria, providing continuity. In addition Fedustria membership will open up a broad spectrum of additional services, such as social affairs, environment and technical support.”

BFHI’s working group activities for panels, softwoods and hardwoods will be continued under the new structure, while topics such as the EUTR, FSC/PEFC certification, CITES, customs regulations, statistics and CE-marking will be covered by Fedustria experts. BFHI representatives will take seats on the Fedustria board and the latter has also taken up the BFHI’s ETTF membership. Koen de Witte, CEO of former BFHI member Altripan, welcomed the merger.

“This framework will give us greater support in adapting to constantly changing regulation and working out a level playing field in terms of EUTR, responsible purchasing and quality policy,” he said.

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Wood sector is key to bioeconomic development

AEIM is hosting a special event on Timber and the Bioeconomy. To be held in Madrid on March 9, the day before its General Assembly, the seminar will look at how the wood industry can contribute to and capitalise on this model for sustainable, low carbon development.

“The bioeconomy is a novel concept, pointing to a new economic approach based on renewable resources, in which wood can play a key role, especially in sustainable construction,” said General Secretary Alberto Romero.

The event, in which the European Sustainable Tropical Timber Organisation is a partner, will also look at the role of trade associations in developing ethical and environmental policy. Speakers include Ignacio Ferrero Muñoz, University of Navarra Professor of Business Ethics, and Manuel Lainez Andrés, Director of the National Institute of Agricultural and Food Research and Technology.

AEIM is also now participating in the ‘Together for the Forests’ (Juntos por los bosques) lobbying platform. This brings together 32 Spanish forestry and timber bodies to put forward sector development proposals.

“We have already presented to the Spanish Assembly and Environment and Agriculture Ministry,” said Mr Alberto. “One aim is to promote timber products’ value in the context of a bio- or circular economy.”

To register for Timber and the Bioeconomy: www.aeim.org
FLEGT-licensed timber greeted as sustainable development milestone

The arrival in the EU from Indonesia of the first ever FLEGT-licensed timber was greeted by the European trade as a major advance in international timber legality assurance and a blow against illegal logging.

The shipments, largely of plywood and door blanks, landed mid-January at the ports of Antwerp in Belgium and Tilbury in the UK, where special welcome receptions were attended by importers, government and Indonesian ambassadorial representatives.

The Belgian event, hosted by importers Altripan and FEPCO, was attended by around 50 people, including Belgian Federal Minister for Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development Marie Christine Marghem, ETTF Secretary General André de Boer and Filip De Jaeger, Deputy General Manager of Belgian timber and wood products association Fedustria.

“This is a key moment for the timber sector worldwide in our progress towards achieving a level playing field for the legitimate industry and finally eradicating illegal trade,” said Mr de Boer.

HE Yuri O Thamrin, Indonesian Ambassador to Belgium, said the occasion was a milestone for his country’s trade, environmental image and sustainable development. His government also saw lessons learned in the FLEGT initiative being applied elsewhere, including in achieving sustainable palm oil production.

European Commission Director General for the Environment Daniel Calleja Crespo agreed that it was ‘only the beginning’, with the hope that other VPA signatory suppliers would follow suit and complete implementation soon.

The Tilbury event was attended by importers, Indonesian Ambassador Dr Rizal Sukma and his team, and representatives of the Department for International Development (DFID), which has long supported Indonesia’s timber legality efforts.

Dr Sukma described the shipments as a ‘concrete outcome of close cooperation on timber legality assurance between Indonesia and the EU and liaison between our trades’.

“FLEGT-licensing relieves the burdens of further due diligence under the EUTR and other administrative difficulties from our exports, making them more attractive to European customers,” he said. “It underpins our progress toward sustainability, helps combat illegal trade and ultimately maintain our forests.”

Piers Latham, Director of importer/distributor James Latham, said FLEGT licensed timber was a major advance and complemented his company’s commitment to sustainability.

“What we would now like to see is increased communication around FLEGT licensing for the trade and awareness-raising in the marketplace,” he said.

Andrew Tilbury, Managing Director of fellow importer Falcon Panel Products, said FLEGT licensing was in also tune with market developments.

“Customers are increasingly demanding evidence of both legality and sustainability certification,” he said.

Dr Sukma said Indonesia now wanted to share its FLEGT VPA experience with other countries engaged with the initiative.

“We don’t want this to be for our exclusive benefit,” he said. “Illegal timber and the forest loss it causes is a global problem, so we want FLEGT licensing to be part of a global solution.”

FLEGT levels legality playing field

GTF: What does it mean for you that FLEGT licensed wood is available from Indonesia?

Koen de Witte (KdW): You have to bear in mind [EUTR-required] due diligence is not a science and the way it’s done depends on a company’s commitment and resources. But FLEGT creates a level playing field [in legality-assurance for buyers and suppliers].

There are also European customers that have been afraid of touching tropical wood because of risk under the EUTR and negative publicity. FLEGT means that we can promote tropical wood to these companies again.

GTF: Will Indonesia gain competitive advantage from FLEGT licensing?

Alexander de Groot (AdG): We’ll need to see how the next months go and make customers aware, but I think FLEGT will give Indonesia a very good market position.

GTF: How are customers responding to availability of FLEGT-licensed timber products? Has there been perceptible increase in demand?

KdW: Unfortunately not yet. But companies like Fepco and Altripan will push for it by making the product available and promoting it – this is our responsibility now.

AdG: It will also be the responsibility of European governments to help promote FLEGT licensed wood. For example, FLEGT should be immediately incorporated into public procurement rules and given the same status as FSC or PEFC.

For the full report: www.gtf-info.com

Hosts of the Antwerp FLEGT-licensed timber reception Alexander de Groot and Koen de Witte, CEOs of FEPCO and Altripan, told Sarah Storck, of the Global Timber Forum (GTF), that they saw trading and image-building benefits, as well as added legality assurance, leading from the licensing breakthrough.
Powerful due diligence and business tool is born

The ETTF and International Tropical Timber Technical Association (ATIBT) have signed a memorandum of understanding on the merger of their timber legality risk assessment websites.

The organisations say the sites, www.timbertradeportal.com and www.legal-timber.info, fulfil similar functions, but have unique attributes too. Merging them under the Timber Trade Portal brand will deliver efficiencies and synergies, and create a more powerful online tool for supporting traders’ sourcing and legality due diligence activities worldwide.

The Timber Trade Portal comprises profiles of supplier countries worldwide. These include business contacts and trade data, with information on timber and forestry sector regulation and controls. This helps EU traders ensure they are sourcing legally and fulfilling due diligence obligations under the EUTR.

The Portal launched last year, supported by the European Sustainable Tropical Timber Coalition and the International Tropical Timber Organisation. Developed and managed by Netherlands-based Form International, it includes legality and trade profiles of 24 countries on four continents.

Combining business and legality information creates a convenient one-stop shop, said ETTF Secretary André de Boer. “It helps international traders develop contacts and do business, while ensuring that business is legal and EUTR compliant.”

The ATIBT’s Legal-Timber began as part of an EU FLEGT project to improve international communication on VPA/FLEGT and the EUTR. It now has ‘country sheets’ on five African producers: Liberia, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Cameroon and Democratic Republic of Congo. These detail the export documentation needed, species and products supplied and which timbers are under trade or CITES restrictions.

The site also offers an EUTR-aligned due diligence system. “The aim of Legal-Timber was to help timber importing companies put in place EUTR due diligence by providing a prototype DDS, plus relevant and verified producer country information and latest EUTR news,” said ATIBT General Director Benoît Jobbé-Duval. “It also lists supplier country industry organisations, plus relevant and verified producer country importing companies put in place EUTR diligence system.

Bringing the sites together, he added, was the natural step. “It’s more efficient to have one site and the merger will deliver a long-term, unique and high quality information portal, with greater resources for updating and growing into the future,” he said.

The combined site, at www.timbertradeportal.com will be in English and French.

Drilling down to legality DNA

NEPCon has produced a report on timber species identification systems as part of its Supporting Legal Timber Trade programme with the Global Timber Forum. The initiative is designed to help traders meet EUTR and other market legality regulation requirements worldwide.

Authored by NEPCon’s Oliver Cupit, the Timber Testing Techniques report examines ‘classical’ visual species identification methods, macro- and microscopic anatomy analysis. It then comes up to date with DNA analysis, which compares genetic sequences in wood, and stable isotope analysis, which measures ratios of common elements in wood to give an ‘isotope signature’ which helps identify origin.

The report cites cases where various species and origin testing methods have been used, and lists wood testing centres across Europe.

Click here for the full study

ETTF addresses legality and market opportunity

The ETTF is participating in a number of key global industry events through March.

Secretary André de Boer presented at the ATIBT-Forum in Dubai at the start of the month. The event covered a range of topics, from forest management and adding value to tropical timber and training. Mr de Boer will spoke on the EUTR.

He is also joining a trade mission to Myanmar, following an earlier trip to assess the country’s drafting timber legality assurance system (MTLAS), prior to the end of its government logging moratorium in April. At the end of the month Mr de Boer will address opportunities and threats for tropical timber at an FSC meeting with forest owners in Bonn.

He will also participate in meetings at the Indonesian embassy with VPA-candidate country forest owners.

Construction a cut above

Amsterdam is the latest city to head for timber high-rise, with a 21-storey cross laminated timber (CLT) apartment block starting construction in November.

The Haut building – short for Haut Couture – has been designed by Team V Architecture, with Lingotto as developers. The construction schedule of the 73m, 55 apartment block is approximately the same as Vienna’s 24-storey CLT and glulam HoHo development, so the two will vie for the title of world’s tallest residential timber building.

One reason timber is being used is its sustainability and carbon sink capacity, with the softwood CLT storing 3 million kg of CO₂.
The conference not only focused on the timber construction process, but also the capacity of the forests to deliver sufficient sustainably sourced raw material. Vivian Kvist Johannsen, of the University of Copenhagen, and Professor Jonas Rönnberg, of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, contended that forest growth in Denmark and other parts of the world, made it feasible, adding that managing forestry for timber was itself environmentally beneficial.

Mr Green, famed for his wood building advocacy TED Talks, said global demographics made high-rise building vital. “But wood is the only way to make it sustainable,” he told the Conclave audience, adding that the timber and construction industries had a mission to debunk misinformation about wood-based buildings, especially multi-storey.

The architect has recently developed a blueprint for the 35-storey Baobab timber development for Paris. “People are afraid wood can burn or isn’t strong enough. So perceptions of the possible must be changed. Prestige projects with 40 storey skyscrapers must prove timber is safe to build with.”

Another guest speaker, Nick Milestone, of timber hybrid building specialist B&K reinforced Mr Green’s message. His company worked on London’s Dalston Lane project, the world’s biggest wood-based building, using 4,400m³ of cross laminated timber. He described B&K’s prefabricated system as a “quick flat pack technology”.

“Wood is also lighter than concrete so reduces deliveries to site up to 80%,” he said. “Go2wood was a great conference”, said DTTF CEO Jakob Rygg Klaumann. “It was a rare opportunity to link the value chain – embracing forests, wood working industries, trade, architects, engineers, designers, constructors, as well as education institutions. It put timber on the map and in the minds of people as a serious building material that will contribute significantly to a not-too-distant sustainable future.”

The UK Federation revamps RPP

The UK Timber Trade Federation (TTF) has launched a revised version of its Responsible Purchasing Policy (RPP) legality assurance due diligence system.

The RPP was regarded as a model for timber organisation procurement systems, but needed updating to meet members’ changing due diligence needs.

The result, said TTF Managing Director David Hopkins, is a ‘simpler, more robust toolkit for meeting EUTR legality requirements’. The revision was led by TTF Head of Policy and Sustainability Mike Worrell and overseen by its Forests Forever Committee.

“The RPP now better enables EUTR due diligence procedures, increases reporting on sustainability indicators and provides greater risk management,” said Mr Worrell. “It should give members and their customers increased confidence in the RPP logo.”

The TTF is also planning a meeting of European timber trade bodies this spring to discuss topics including EUTR, FLEGT and FLEGT VPAs, plus the implications of Brexit.

Click here for the RPP Hub page
Dutch environmental policy points to timber

The outcome of latest Dutch government climate change and wider environmental policy decisions should be increased market opportunity for wood, according to Netherlands Timber Trade Association Managing Director Paul van den Heuvel.

The country’s aim is to create a truly ‘circular economy’ over the next 30 years, with the stress on using products and materials that can be re-used, recycled and ultimately disposed of in an environmentally sound way.

To this end Economic Affairs Minister Henk Kamp recently submitted the report ‘Netherlands Circular in 2050’ to the House of Representatives.

The first element of the policy, the ‘Commodities Agreement’ was signed on January 24. This states that: “Where new resources are needed, fossil, critical and non-durable Commodities should be replaced by renewable and widely available raw materials”.

“This clearly represents an excellent opportunity for wood and wood products,” said Mr van den Heuvel.

The initial component of the Commodities Agreement; he added, is the Netherlands ‘Forest and Wood Action Plan’, a timber sector and forest owners initiative, involving the NTTA.

“This provides for the Dutch forestry sector to both expand the forest and deliver significantly more wood to help meet Dutch climate and circular economy goals;” said Mr van den Heuvel. “It was countersigned by Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Minister of State for Infrastructure and Environment Sharon Dijksma at the Dutch National Climate Summit in October.”

Over the last six years it has run a series of impactful competitions and educational events in association with design, architectural and technical universities.

In the latest project, HTCA worked with The Architectural University to recreate “Le Cabanon”, Le Corbusier’s famous small holiday cabin, comprising okoumé plywood and pine.

“The event was a great success, with Le Cabanon, on show first at the Athens Benaki Museum, then in Chania in Crete, attracting over 4,000 visitors,” said HTCA president Christos Papanastasiou. “And such projects are having an effect. Greek construction is at low levels, but wood is gaining market share.”

Success in tough market

The post-recession Greek timber business remains tough and highly competitive, but the Hellenic Timber Companies Association, continues its initiatives to encourage architects, engineers and end users to use more wood.

UK industry puts points to parliament

As part of efforts to raise its profile with government, the UK Confederation of Timber Industries (CTI) held its first Industry Conference in Westminster, London in November.

Delegates and speakers included Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Timber Industry All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), which formed last year, giving industry attendees the chance to access key policy makers and opinion formers.

The CTI also used the event to launch its Policy Reports outlining its plans and strategies; these covered sustainability, value and growth and skills and education.

The first session featured a speaker panel drawn from industry, parliament and other experts in the field. They addressed themes such as the EUTR and global timber trade regulation, wood’s critical role in developing low carbon economies, forest growth and, given its topicality, Brexit.

The second panel discussion also featured MP and industry speakers, plus representatives of the builder, developer and architectural sectors. They discussed the UK housing shortage, modular homes, timber frame buildings, apprenticeships, the timber supply chain, skills building and construction market forecasts.

“The timber supply chain is a vital part of UK manufacturing and construction and provides employment across the country,” said David Hopkins, Managing Director of the Timber Trade Federation (TTF) and Member of the CTI Board of Directors. “This conference was a great way to highlight the facts to policy makers.”

IHC in Venice

The International Hardwood Conference takes place this year in Venice, hosted by Fedecomlegno.

Organised in association with the ETTF and the European Organisation of Sawmill Industries, the IHC venue will be the Hilton Molino Stucky Hotel on the island of Giudecca in front of San Marco Square.

“The conference will cover a wide range of major topics concerning production and trade in temperate and tropical hardwood sectors,” said Fedecomlegno Chief Executive Stefano Dezzutto. “Speakers will cover market analysis, sustainability and innovative applications – all with an Italian twist!”

IHC 2017 starts on Wednesday November 15 with a welcome event. The main conference takes place on November 16, and the Gala Dinner that evening in a central Venice Palazzo. A city tour is planned for November 17.

The IHC 2017 website will be on line soon, giving programme and booking information.
UK Timber Trade Federation heads Ghana fact finding mission

The UK Timber Trade Federation has led a European trade mission to Ghana to evaluate the country’s progress under its EU FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement (FLEGT VPA).

The delegation comprised company and trade body representatives from Denmark, Spain, Germany, France, Belgium and the UK, including Danish Timber Trade Federation Director Jakob Rygg Klaumann and Le Commerce du Bois EUTR Officer Patrick Baraize.

The mission, late 2016, was co-ordinated by UK TTF Head of Sustainability Mike Worrell. A key focus was Ghana’s online Wood Tracking System, one of the mainstays of its timber legality assurance framework, with an overview delivered by Ghanaian Forestry Commission (GFC) Head of Validation Chris Beeko. The system tallies harvest and timber surplus panels from the Endless Stair.

The group visited forests and mills, with information uploaded to a central database via handhelds in the forest, tracking material through the supply chain. Mission participants gained an overview of the Ghanaian Forestry Sector, from forest to mill, and met other representatives from the GFC, civil society organisations and Ghanaian trade associations.

The conclusion was that Ghana, which signed its VPA in 2009, has made significant progress, both in implementing verification procedures and in its tracking system. Mr Worrell said delegates’ role was now to communicate these invaluable findings to the European market to encourage greater trade with Ghana.

See p10 for Mr Baraize’s account of the trip. Click here for a full mission report.

Healthy start for tulipwood CLT

Tulipwood is generally regarded as a paint-grade interior joinery and cabinet carcassing material. This project shows it has much wider application possibilities.

“It has a better strength-to-weight ratio than concrete or steel, is a carbon negative resource, and has a more sophisticated finish than softwood,” said dRMM’s Alex de Rijke.

The 260m² Maggie’s Centre uses 17m³ of CLT and features ultra-durable thermo-treated interior and exterior tulipwood cladding.

The application of timber at the Centre also ties in with the belief that wood construction delivers a healthy interior environment and imparts a sense of well-being. Consequently the healthcare sector is seen as a major potential market for hardwood CLT construction.

The Maggie’s Centre should be completed by the summer.

Hamburg move to boost FTD global profile

The GD Holz Foreign Trade Day (FTD) is moving to Hamburg as part of moves to raise international awareness and attendance at the event.

The GD Holz Foreign Trade Department, which organises and hosts the FTD, said the event had established itself as a key occasion for its 130-strong company membership at its former Bremen home.

Relocating to Hamburg, said GD Holz Head of Foreign Trade Nils Olaf Petersen, would make the FTD even more of a global forum and outward looking.

“The Foreign Trade Department Board has decided to recast the die and to make the FTD a more international occasion, with producers and sellers from abroad attending as guests and speakers,” he said. “Hamburg is another world-renowned German importing seaport, and for foreign delegates it is easier to get to.”

The event format is for delegates to break out into four group meetings to address specific divisional interests within the trade; traders, brokers, plywood planing mills and tropical timber. A general assembly follows, where members convene to tackle trade-wide topics and listen to key note speakers on macroeconomic issues.

The FTD is also an important networking opportunity and includes a pre-conference dinner. It takes place this year on March 30-31 and will include election of the Foreign Trade Department Chairman.

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An American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) showcase project has led to the first building being constructed entirely in hardwood cross laminated timber (CLT).

In 2013, AHEC teamed with architects dRMM and engineers Arup to develop Endless Stair, a multi-direction staircase, made entirely in US tulipwood CLT, as a showpiece for the London Design Festival.

According to AHEC European Director David Venables, this demonstrated the structural potential of one of the most prolific and, therefore, most sustainable of American hardwoods.

The same team has now come together to deliver the Maggie’s Cancer Care Centre in Oldham, Northern England, with the structure in tulipwood CLT, including some surplus panels from the Endless Stair.

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Presidents in place for Italian shows

The new presidents for Fedecomlegno and parent organisation FederlegnoArredo have been elected in time for the Italian timber and furniture sectors’ big showcase events, Made Expo and Salone del Mobile.

Emanuele Orsini, 43, took almost 100% of the votes for the FederlegnoArredo role. Following studies, he joined the family timber construction business Settem Costruzioni and was later elected President of Assolegno, the timber processing and construction trade body, and an affiliate, with Fedecomlegno, of FederlegnoArredo.

“The primary mission of my presidency is to tie this Federation more into the regions where member companies are,” said Mr Orsini. “We need constant dialogue with all players in our complex supply chain to help tackle the challenges of everyday business.”

The new President of Fedecomlegno, Alessandro Calcaterra, was elected together with its new board in January.

Mr Calcaterra is CEO of Legnonord spa, a third generation family firm supplying the range of timber and panel products.

“My Presidency coincides with major international challenges, but we also have some positive solutions, for example the EU Timber Regulation and associated due diligence, which are now producing positive effects,” he said. “We must now highlight wood’s unique benefits, as the only truly sustainable raw material, particularly given our opportunities to deliver a real boom in timber construction over the next decade.”

Mr Calcaterra said he also aims to broaden Fedecomlegno’s membership and work closely with associate Italian EUTR Monitoring Organisation ConLegno.

MADE Expo www.madeexpo.it/en/ takes place from 8 to 11 March and Salon del Mobile www.salonemilano.it/en/ 4 to 9 April. They are expected to attract over 200,000 and 300,000 visitors respectively.

Climate summit inspires strategy

Fedustria, which now incorporates the Belgian Timber Importers Federation (see p2), is working on two timber market development strategies inspired by the outcomes from the Flemish government’s Flanders Climate Summit last year.

The summit brought together industry federations and policy makers to focus on achieving a low-carbon Belgian economy and society.

Fedustria subsequently developed its initiative to highlight wood’s superior carbon storage benefits, life cycle assessment performance and capacity to advance achievement of a circular economy.

“Wood has a key part to play in Flemish climate policy,” said Fedustria Deputy Managing Director Filip de Jaeger.

“Substituting non-renewable materials with wood reduces CO2 emissions and supports sustainable forest management and growth.”

The initiative is aimed at taking these messages to policy-makers, architects, students and consumers. It is also targeting the authorities to encourage them to specify wood and capitalise on its carbon sink capacities.

Fedustria’s second policy strand, working with the HSOB timber frame association, aims to promote use of wood in construction. Building in timber, it maintains delivers low energy, high embedded carbon housing. As part of the campaign it is supporting more timber training for architects.

Post-EUTR import insights

Green deal 2.0 – the sustainability Covenant

The Netherlands Green Deal 2.0 is set to comprise a ‘Covenant’, pledging participants to encourage sustainable forest management through procurement and promotion of sustainably sourced timber and wood products.

The first Green Deal, co-initiated by the Netherlands Timber Trade Association (NTTA) and Joinery Manufacturers Association (NBvT), which ended 2015, allied importers, end users, specifiers and government to make sustainable sourcing the sector norm. It saw certified timber sales rise and growth in awareness of the need for sustainable forest management.

The Covenant, backed by the Netherlands ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Economy and Infrastructure and Environment, is designed to build on the success of the first initiative. So far it has been endorsed by 32 organisations.

“It has also come up with two slogans,” said NTTA Managing Director Paul van Den Heuvel. “The first is ‘The Netherlands Sustainable Timber Standard’, the second, addressing the risk of forest conversion where it’s not sustainably managed for timber production, is ‘Use it or lose it’.”

A new report from Fedecomlegno analyses latest figures on timber, paper and furniture imports into the EU, providing a picture of trade trends post implementation of the EUTR.

The study, European Union timber and timber-related products imports –Monitoring the timber and paper market following the introduction of Regulation (EU) No. 995/2010, was undertaken by the Fedecomlegno Research Centre under the supervision of Chief Executive Stefano Dezzutto and Deputy Director of FederlegnoArredo Sebastiano Cerullo. It follows a statistical report released last year, but with updates and more detail, plus new graphs and tables to communicate with a wider pan-industry audience.

It looks at EU-wide figures and trade movements and breaks out Italian imports and EU exports from Indonesia and Myanmar.

“The report will initially be released to Italian and EU institutions, before being made more widely available,” said Mr Dezzutto. “It will then be updated annually.”
Optimism amidst uncertainty

A resilient EU economy and construction sector and post-Brexit UK stability give the European softwood sector cause for optimism, despite global economic and political unpredictability, writes European Organisation of Sawmills Industries’ President Sampsa Auvinen.

“We were guided through Ghana’s progress toward full implementation of its FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement (FLEGT VPA) in the south west district of Sewfi Wiawso. Here the country’s Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS) is being tested before nationwide rollout.

The outcome of the UK’s Brexit vote created the most significant uncertainty, alongside MENA region demand prospects. But overall sawn timber production was forecast to grow by about 2% per year, both in 2016 and 2017, keeping the supply/demand balance healthy.

We’ve had little further clarity on Brexit since, but the UK economy has continued on the same path, with encouraging construction activity and timber consumption. Uncertainty over UK departure from the EU will continue, with impacts on UK and European economies not expected to become clear for up to a decade. But we will just have to get used to it.

With the state of oil prices, the MENA Region’s economic outlook does not look promising. Sawn timber imports from Europe and Russia have decreased and, with social unrest and continuing oil price volatility, demand is expected to remain weak.

However, demand from China and Japan has remained strong. Late 2015 the Chinese economy showed signs of slowdown, but this did not materialise and sawn timber imports continued to grow. It will be interesting to see how long this continues.

US–Canada lumber agreement negotiations continue, but it is likely that some sort of import duties or quotas will be introduced, putting upward pressure on North American lumber prices. European sawn timber shipments to the US have increased steadily and this will continue, if not pick up.

European economic growth is also forecast to continue, albeit at just 1.4% in 2017, and it will be the fourth consecutive year of construction upturn. Average construction growth is still below 2%, but we are clearly out of the crisis.

We still have a way to go to reach 2007’s record European sawn timber volumes, but 2017 is expected to exceed 2008’s total.

As forecasted in Paris, production is not expected to grow rapidly in any European country, with log availability in most being satisfactory, but insufficient to raise output drastically.

But, while, if anything uncertainty has increased with the rise of populist politics in Europe and Trump’s US Presidency, our outlook remains cautiously optimistic.”

Ghana advances on legality assurance

Le Commerce du Bois EUTR officer Patrick Baraize reports from the UK TTF-led mission to Ghana to review its FLEGT VPA implementation (see p7).

“We were guided through Ghana’s progress toward full implementation of its FLEGT VPA process and were fairly paid.

Mill directors also showed interest in the FLEGT-VPA process and were working on compliance with the GFC.

We subsequently met other companies, who said not all had the resources of those we visited. They stressed the importance of involving all types and size of operation in the FLEGT-VPA process, and urged greater contact on the issues with EU traders.

This reinforced my feeling that we’d only seen an ideal sample of Ghana’s forestry system. However, the GFC emphasised that Sewfi Wiawso would be a TLAS model for the rest of the country.

So challenges remain for Ghana to get all timber companies to the same legality performance level. More communication on available Ghanaian timber species is also needed and private sector woodlands require integration into legality assurance and enforcement systems.

However, our overall view was positive. If Ghana succeeds in applying the Sewfi Wiawso model to all forests, it should finalise its VPA. The country also has other advantages in this context; political stability, a relatively good corruption perception index and sound infrastructure.”
Hardwood balancing act

The international hardwood trade does not envisage seismic trends this year. But there are concerns beyond trading factors, including whether FLEGT-licensed timber could impact certified sustainable timber demand, writes Armand Stockmans, Director of Somex Wood Import.

“It’s too early to gauge precisely how the European hardwood sector will fare through 2017. But, while 2016 ended with a slowdown, and individual markets are showing a range of trends, overall indicators point to general stability.

France, for instance, remains difficult. Prices and volumes are low and turnover decreasing. However, the Netherlands is picking up with timber and construction sectors ahead nearly 9.5% in the last three months.

Initial 2016 growth in Belgium petered out in the second half. But currently the situation looks stable. Meanwhile, Spain is in better mood and consumption is increasing. The supply side also looks reasonably calm, with availability and price trending static or down for some species, but up for others.

Asian demand is picking up again in Africa and some species like Tali and Azobe logs are difficult to get. However, Sipo prices are level and Iroko is rising, but slowly. FSC Ayous is scarce and demand is strong. But Padouk availability improved, thanks to lower demand from China and India. In fact shortage turned into a surplus, although, with strong Belgian consumption and Asian buyers returning, this could evaporate. Sapele prices are up again too: 5% generally, and 10% for fixed sizes. The basis of this though is the positive Dutch market, which is moving increasingly to finger-jointed product in sapele and meranti. After increases in heavier variants Nemesu and Bukit, Meranti prices have plateaued at a higher level.

Suppliers of Brazilian decking also upped prices, which buyers, mainly in France, refused to pay. Once existing stock is exhausted, however, we can expect these increases to feed through.

We are also seeing demand increases for finger-jointed laminates in all countries – presenting an opening for using lesser known species.

The arrival of the first FLEGT-licensed timber from Indonesia is also positive overall. But will it be for FSC-certified suppliers in the country, or indeed, worldwide? Availability of FLEGT-licensed timber could lead buyers and suppliers settling for legally-assured only and not progressing to FSC or PEFC-certified material. In Africa we’re already hearing: ‘Our FLEGT VPA will soon be implemented, we don’t need to do anything until then’.

The market may also open to buyers who don’t want to, or can’t implement EUTR due diligence legality assurance systems.

To minimise these risks, while welcoming FLEGT-licensing, the trade should emphasise that our goal is legality and sustainability.

AEIM President urges supplier legality standard clarity

In an interview with Spanish timber sector magazine Madera Sostenible, AEIM President Carles Alberch urged a tougher approach on legality for both buyer and supplier.

For a start, Mr Alberch told the magazine that Spanish authorities should be even stricter on EUTR enforcement.

The government, he maintained had been slow in implementing it and has now delegated enforcement responsibilities to regional authorities. “These may have an understanding of the agricultural sector, but are not so familiar with the international wood trade,” he said. “This generates problems for importers. Getting required documentation for EUTR Compliance is difficult enough, but the authorities don’t know what to ask and can’t advise on how we obtain the information.”

In the meantime, he said, the AEIM has stepped in to support the industry. It advises on EUTR compliance and has devised its own EUTR-compliant due diligence system. It also liaises closely on legality issues with the authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Mr Alberch said the government needs to get the EUTR message out to finished goods providers too, especially those importing from third-party manufacturers abroad which make goods from imported timber, such as the Chinese. “These imports also need tight policing and are an area where customs should step in,” said Mr Alberch. The EU, he added, should also be more rigorous in legality standards demanded of other countries.

“We Europeans set ourselves increasingly rigorous requirements, but do not demand them from third parties,” he said.

Mr Alberch also addressed the need for a Spanish timber marketing campaign in the face of rising alternative materials competition.

“We do not yet have a timber culture, so need some basic promotion,” he said. “But this need not be such a great challenge. We can learn from Northern and Central European countries and translate and adapt their tried and tested campaigns and marketing materials.”

Click here for the full article
FLEGT boosts civil society self-help

After playing a key role in implementing their country’s FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement with the EU, Indonesian civil society groups are sharing experiences with counterparts in other countries engaged in the initiative. Mike Jeffree reports

In early January, ships from Indonesia carrying the first ever cargoes of FLEGT-licensed, legally assured timber docked at Antwerp in Belgium and Tilbury in the UK.

The occasion was greeted enthusiastically across the EU timber sector and garnered trade media coverage throughout Europe and Southeast Asia.

At quayside welcome receptions, it was billed as a key moment in international timber legality (see p3). Speakers said it would boost the EU timber sector and EU industry and authorities to this point; and EU trade media coverage throughout Europe, Indonesia’s European exports and timber legality (see p3). Speakers said it would boost the EU timber sector and EU industry and authorities to this point; and EU trade media coverage throughout Europe

And JPIK’s formally acknowledged role as independent monitor has already led to reviews and operational improvements, almost annually.”

Reading this, CSOs in other VPA countries might be daunted by the challenges ahead. But thanks to the Indonesians’ successful trail blazing, the good news is that they now have a model to follow. Moreover, Indonesian CSOs are also keen to support counterparts elsewhere. The hoped for outcome is that, while VPA processes in other countries will be no less demanding, their CSOs should find them easier to navigate.

Indonesian CSOs began connecting with stakeholder groups in other VPA countries on an ad hoc basis. Then exchange became more structured, with particularly strong and frequent connections with Ghana, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, but also liaison with Malaysia and other countries.

“We mostly communicate remotely, but CSOs in Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam have all visited Indonesia and we’ve been to Myanmar to share perspectives,” said Ms Mardi.

How to achieve stakeholder involvement in VPA negotiations is a key topic of these conversations, as is how to access government information needed to monitor the forestry and timber sectors.

Ghanaian CSOs, Ms Mardi said, have drawn on the Indonesian experience to develop proposals for their VPA’s transparency annex, while discussions with the Vietnamese have centred on monitoring the VPA timber legality assurance system. The Thais consulted on smallholder and community forest engagement, and preparing input for their timber legality definition.

The CSOs in these countries themselves take an equally positive view of what seems to be developing into an international VPA

continued...
FLEGT boosts communications and support network. In 2016, Vietnam and the EU agreed in principle on the content of a VPA, which they expect to sign this year. This was something Vietnamese CSOs had urged for some time, said Tue Tran Ngoc, FLEGT Manager at the Vietnamese Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD), with their efforts becoming increasingly coordinated since 2012, when they formed the Vietnamese NGO FLEGT Network (VNGO FLEGT).

This umbrella group has focused on the potential impact of a VPA on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), how to support forest-dependent communities through the process, and building stakeholder capacity for getting involved. It is also pressing for representation on the EU/Vietnam FLEGT Joint Implementation Committee and to become a FLEGT independent monitor.

Against this background, Mr Tran Ngoc said insights from Indonesian CSOs have been particularly valuable. “Advice on securing participation in VPA negotiations has been especially useful,” he said. “Currently there is no independent monitoring provision in the proposed Vietnam/EU VPA, so learning about how they achieved monitor status and the challenges of the role has been useful.”

Warangkana Rattanarat, Thailand Country Program Coordinator for the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC), sees further obstacles ahead for her country in implementing their VPA. But there’s growing awareness of the incentives and CSOs are increasingly proactive in communication on the issues with public and private sectors. “We see FLEGT as an engine for forest reform and ensuring rights of small and marginalised stakeholders,” said Ms Rattanarat. “It should also deliver economic development. Demand for legal, sustainably sourced timber is increasing globally and a VPA would improve our market access, leading to better business and supply chain management.”

The Thais and Indonesians first exchanged on FLEGT at a VPA forum for ASEAN CSOs. This was followed by a fact-finding visit to Indonesia for meetings with smallholder organisations and NGOs, and ‘intensive discussions’ with other CSOs.

“The first link came when Indonesian CSOs visited Myanmar in 2012. ‘We held joint workshops and study tours,’ said Mr Lian Thawng. ‘Now we connect around twice a year. Indonesia has some parallels with us on political issues and we learned how its CSOs mobilised, engaged with stakeholders and advocated to government, international NGOs and the EU. We have a long way to go to achieve sustainability, legality assurance and fair distribution, but we’re in a better situation than before. There is meaningful discussion among stakeholders and CSO-government engagement is improving.’

Ms Mardi now expects international CSO communication on FLEGT VPAs to increase. She is also encouraged by growing government and private sector exchange between countries on the topic.

From the Indonesian experience, she also had further core advice for CSOs elsewhere on VPA engagement. “You must have a clear idea of what you want from the process and fight to be heard,” she said. “But in a multi-stakeholder process, without compromising your integrity and goals, you are also expected to negotiate and find common positions. First get the process moving. Then reinforce from there.”