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Law to stop illegal timber imports an important step

Social justice, environment and international development organisations have welcomed today's announcement that a re-elected Labor Government would make it a criminal offence to import illegally-sourced timber.

The Australian Conservation Foundation, World Vision, the Uniting Church, the Humane Society International and Friends of the Earth said the proposed law would fulfil a promise made by Labor before the 2007 election.

"This announcement has been a long time coming but is an important step in tackling the chronic problems of illegal logging and helping forest nations reduce the carbon emissions that come from deforestation," said ACF's Asia-Pacific campaigner Lee Tan. "All parties contesting this election should commit to stop importing timber that cannot be verified as having been legally sourced as this trade fuels corruption, environmental destruction and social disharmony in our closest neighbours in Indonesia and PNG."

World Vision's Head of International Programs Kerin Ord said: "Real action on illegal logging is an important first step towards protecting forests and the vulnerable communities who depend on them," she said. "We support the Labor Government's announcement today to restrict the sale of illegally logged wood in Australia because it will protect communities from the impacts of illegal logging and encourage the sustainable use of forests."

The Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania welcomed Labor's commitment to penalise those seeking to profit from stolen goods from other countries. "This is a step forward for Australia in meeting its international obligations to combat corruption and transnational crime," said Cath James, Environment Officer with the Uniting Church.

"Heavy penalties should be part of this legislation, like they are in the US Lacey Act, to discourage further attempt to bring in illegal timber and forest products," said Cam Walker of Friends of the Earth.

"The proposed law should include strong due diligence processes to ensure only legally and sustainably source timber and wood products are coming into Australia," said Michael Kennedy of Humane Society International.

Social justice, environment and international development organisations in Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea have been calling for this ban for many years.