

## Wyevale garden furniture: fuelling rainforest destruction and human rights abuses



Illegal logging in Sarawak is threatening the survival of forest dwelling communities ©Greenpeace/Ngo

**‘Short of a miraculous transformation in the attitudes of peoples and governments, the Earth’s remaining forests and their associated biodiversity are destined to disappear in the coming decades’**

*Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director, United Nations Environment Program, May 2001*

Sales of garden furniture in the UK reached an all time high in 2003, with consumers spending £557 million.<sup>1</sup> With timber being the preferred choice of material for approximately a third of this furniture,<sup>2</sup> it is critical that consumers can be confident that the tables and chairs they buy for their garden are coming from environmentally and socially responsible sources.

Outlets like B&Q sell garden furniture certified to the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which ensures timber products are from legal and well managed sources. In contrast, sales of garden furniture by outlets like Wyevale Garden Centres directly contribute to rainforest destruction and human rights abuses in South East Asia.

Greenpeace research has revealed that Wyevale, the largest garden centre group in the UK with over 114 stores throughout England and Wales, is sourcing timber for its 2005 garden furniture range from the last rainforests of South East Asia. Their purchase of timber from Burma also generates revenue for the country’s military dictatorship – one of the most brutal in the world.

Wyevale’s sales account for 16% of all garden products sold within the garden centre market.<sup>3</sup> Although Wyevale claims it is ‘committed to working in an environmentally and socially responsible manner’ and to have timber procurement guidelines in place that aim to ‘ensure that all our wooden furniture is manufactured from timber... sourced from managed forests and to this end we fully support the stringent standards set by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)’<sup>4</sup>, in reality, Wyevale has almost completely failed to adhere to its own policy.

**‘[Indonesia] is almost certainly undergoing a species extinction spasm of planetary proportions’**

*World Bank, 2001<sup>16</sup>*

## Wyevale furniture fuels rainforest destruction and human rights abuses

At the beginning of 2005, Greenpeace sent Wyevale and other major garden furniture retailers a questionnaire asking each company where it was sourcing the timber for its 2005 garden furniture ranges. Additionally, we asked what evidence they could provide that the timber had come from environmentally and socially responsible sources.

A detailed study of Wyevale's response, conversations with its suppliers and further investigation by Greenpeace into the company's supply chain has revealed that Wyevale provided inaccurate and misleading information in response to Greenpeace's questionnaire. Moreover, it has become clear that Wyevale's garden furniture is made with timber that comes from the last remaining rainforests of South East Asia, as well as timber that helps finance the military dictatorship in Burma.

### INVESTIGATIVE REPORT 1:

#### Wyevale fuels destruction of South East Asia's rainforests

Wyevale uses Keruing for its Canterbury and New Jersey garden furniture ranges. Keruing is the name given to around 70 timber species from the genus *Dipterocarpus*, found throughout South East Asia. More than half of these species are classified as critically endangered or endangered.<sup>5</sup>

In response to the Greenpeace questionnaire, Wyevale stated that its timber suppliers, A Mir & Co, sources the Keruing from Malaysia. Wyevale went on to state that it could provide evidence that the timber is not only from a legal source but also that all this timber is purchased through 'legal government approved timber bodies from approved well managed sustainable sources'.<sup>6</sup> Following repeated requests for documentation regarding the source of the timber, Wyevale provided Greenpeace with a number of documents. One of these documents was a certificate of origin from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. These are widely used to mask illegal sourcing of timber.<sup>7</sup> Other documents indicated that the timber was exported from the port of Labuan, an island off the coast of Borneo, in Malaysia. This port is a major trading centre for smuggling illegal Indonesian timber, which passes through Labuan and on to furniture manufacturers in the Far East.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to Wyevale's assertions that the Keruing is certified and from Malaysia, none of the documents provided to Greenpeace indicate the forest of origin, or that the timber comes from a legal or sustainably logged source. In addition, at the Wyevale Supplier Show in Birmingham, February 2005, a company representative for A Mir & Co openly admitted that the Keruing is actually being sourced from the last rainforests in Indonesia.<sup>9</sup> In subsequent telephone conversations the representative confirmed: 'As regards the specific country of origin of the wood... it is sourced from all over Indonesia.'<sup>10</sup>

Over the three month long Greenpeace investigation, Wyevale and Amir & Co repeatedly gave contradictory information on the origin, legality and availability of legitimate certification of the timber. It became very clear that legality and sustainability of the timber source was not high on the agenda – for either company.

The rainforests of both Indonesia and Malaysia are integral to the livelihoods of many indigenous peoples, and these diverse ecosystems support an extraordinary wealth of plant and animal species. Unsustainable logging is threatening the survival of forest dwelling communities and is driving endangered species to the brink of extinction. For example, the critically endangered orang-utan is now only found in Kalimantan and Sumatra (Indonesia)



Wyevale's Canterbury garden furniture range is made from timber sourced from South East Asia's last rainforests  
©Greenpeace/Cobb



Indonesia's rainforests are being destroyed at an alarming rate, most of it illegally  
©Greenpeace/Davison

**'Malaysia's progressive forest loss is gravely detrimental to the orang-utans as this leaves crucial gaps, isolating their population into smaller and more vulnerable groups. This coupled with incidents like forest fires, El Nino droughts and floods has severely endangered the fragile existence of the orang-utan population.'**

*Dr Mikail Kavanagh  
Abdullah, Executive  
Director of WWF-  
Malaysia, November 2004*

and Sabah and Sarawak (Malaysia). More than 80% of the orang-utan's habitat has been destroyed in just 20 years,<sup>11</sup> mainly by illegal logging, and their numbers in Borneo have halved in the last 10 years.<sup>12</sup>

Nearly 90% of all logging in Indonesia is illegal and the country has one of the longest list of endangered species in the world.<sup>13</sup> If the current rate of deforestation continues, the World Bank estimates that Indonesia's lowland forests of Kalimantan and Sumatra will be wiped out by 2010.<sup>14</sup> In Malaysia, over 85% of the original forests have already been lost.<sup>15</sup>

In another garden furniture range (Oxford, from Hartman) Wyevale uses Red Meranti, sourced from Malaysia. Meranti is a group of over 200 individual species that are classified under the genus *Shorea*. More than half of *Shorea* species are classified as critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable.

## INVESTIGATIVE REPORT 2:

### Wyevale funds military dictatorship in Burma

Neptune Classics Ltd is supplying Wyevale with a range of garden furniture made from teak, *Tectona grandis*. In response to the questionnaire, Wyevale stated that its teak was being sourced from FSC certified forests in Costa Rica, government certified plantations in Indonesia and from forests in Burma that are certified by the Myanmar Timber Enterprise (MTE). A sales representative for Neptune has since contradicted Wyevale's statement, saying that all the Neptune teak furniture in Wyevale stores is coming from Burma.<sup>17</sup>

Burma is now the only country in the world that still exports teak from the destruction of natural forests. Timber exports from Burma account for approximately 25% of the total export earnings of the country<sup>18</sup> and is therefore a key source of revenue for the Government – one of the most brutal military dictatorships in the world. Illegal logging of forests in border areas is also widespread,<sup>19</sup> with the timber exported to China and Thailand for manufacturing and re-export. Burma has been charged by the United Nations with a 'crime against humanity' for its systematic abuses of human rights, and has been condemned internationally for refusing to transfer power to the legally elected Government of the country.<sup>20</sup> By using Burmese teak, Wyevale is helping to finance these abuses.

This puts Wyevale at odds with its own Social, Environmental and Ethical policy<sup>21</sup> that states: 'In terms of suppliers, the company is committed to human rights and will not knowingly deal with suppliers who use child labour, who do not pay an economic wage or those who do not provide a safe working environment for their staff'. However, Burmese teak remains on a U.S. Department of Labour list of items for 'which there is a reasonable basis to believe ... may have been mined, produced, or manufactured by forced or indentured child labour'.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, Neptune's public brochure hides the source of its teak garden furniture from consumers. While it states 'Neptune teak is harvested from government controlled plantations'<sup>23</sup>, no mention is made of Burma, the country of origin, and so it is not clear to consumers that buying furniture from Neptune directly finances the Burmese military junta.

### Wyevale also buys timber from uncertified plantations

Using another supplier, Westminster, Wyevale also sources teak from plantations in South East Asia.<sup>24</sup> An assumption often made is that timber coming from plantations is sustainable,



Illegal and destructive logging in South East Asia is driving the orang-utan to the brink of extinction  
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B&Q sells FSC certified garden furniture, so customers can be sure that the timber has come from environmentally and socially responsible sources  
©Greenpeace/Cobb

**'Human rights violations in Burma have been highlighted in successive UN Resolutions which have drawn attention to torture, extra-judicial killings and rape by members of the armed forces, forced labour including the use of child soldiers and forced relocation of villagers.'**

Prime Minister Tony Blair  
1 February 2005<sup>25</sup>

and can reduce ancient forest destruction. However, unless plantations have been certified to FSC standards, there is no guarantee that they are managed in an environmentally or socially responsible manner. In countries like Indonesia, many plantations have been created by clearing rainforests, and are the cause of intense social conflict as indigenous peoples are forced off their lands.

## Greenpeace demands

- 1 **Wyevale must immediately stop selling garden furniture that comes from the destruction of South East Asia's last rainforests**
- 2 **Wyevale must immediately stop selling garden furniture made from Burmese teak.**
- 3 **Wyevale must introduce and implement specific social and environmental guidelines for timber procurement that ensure that all of its timber and timber products are certified to the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)**

- 1 [www.lofa.com/press-releases/Furniture%20details%202004.doc](http://www.lofa.com/press-releases/Furniture%20details%202004.doc)
- 2 [www.lofa.com/press-releases/Furniture%20details%202004.doc](http://www.lofa.com/press-releases/Furniture%20details%202004.doc)
- 3 [www.the-infoshop.com/study/ah24269\\_garden\\_products.html](http://www.the-infoshop.com/study/ah24269_garden_products.html)
- 4 Wyevale's Social, Environmental and Ethical Policy, 2004, [www.wyevale.co.uk/press/20040330.asp](http://www.wyevale.co.uk/press/20040330.asp)
- 5 The World Conservation Union (IUCN) publishes a Red List of Threatened Species which identifies and categorises individual species according to their risk of extinction, in an effort to promote their conservation. Species classified according to the IUCN Red List as (in increasing order of threat) vulnerable, endangered, critically endangered are those which face the highest risk of global extinction in the wild. For more information see [www.redlist.org](http://www.redlist.org)
- 6 Wyevale's response to Greenpeace questionnaire, March 2005
- 7 Conversations with WWF Global Forest and Trade Network, Malaysia, March 2004
- 8 The Last Frontier, Environmental Investigation Agency/Telepak, March 2004
- 9 Conversations between A Mir sales representative and Greenpeace researchers, Wyevale Supplier Show, NEC Birmingham, February 2005
- 10 Conversation between sales representative of A Mir & Co with a Greenpeace researcher by telephone, February 2005
- 11 Orangutan Foundation, [www.orangutan.org.uk/habitat](http://www.orangutan.org.uk/habitat)
- 12 [www.salvonet.com/eia/old-reports/Forests/Reports/tanjung/orangutans.html](http://www.salvonet.com/eia/old-reports/Forests/Reports/tanjung/orangutans.html)
- 13 [www.redlist.org](http://www.redlist.org). For more information on Indonesia read 'Partners in Crime: A Greenpeace investigation of the links between UK and Indonesian timber barons' at [www.saveordelete.com](http://www.saveordelete.com)
- 14 Indonesia: Environment and Natural Resource Management in a Time of Transition, World Bank, February 2001
- 15 The Last Frontier Forests, World Resources Institute, 1997
- 16 Indonesia: Environment and Natural Resource Management in a Time of Transition, World Bank, February 2001
- 17 Conversation between Neptune sales representative and Greenpeace researcher, Wyevale Supplier Show, NEC Birmingham, February 24th 2005
- 18 US Gain Report, Burma Solid Woods Product Annual, 16 February, 2001
- 19 US Gain Report, Burma Solid Woods Product Annual, 16 February, 2001
- 20 For more information on illegal logging in Burma, see Global Witness report: A conflict of interest – The uncertain future of Burma's forests, October 2003
- 21 Wyevale's Social, Environmental and Ethical Policy, 2004, [www.wyevale.co.uk/press/20040330.asp](http://www.wyevale.co.uk/press/20040330.asp)
- 22 [www.earthrights.org/teak/040201toteak.shtml](http://www.earthrights.org/teak/040201toteak.shtml)
- 23 Neptune Classics Brochure, Classic style...lasting value, 2005
- 24 Wyevale's response to Greenpeace questionnaire, March 2005
- 25 Prime Minister's Statement on Tourism to Burma, 1 February 2005



Illegal logging is devastating South East Asia's last remaining rainforests. By ensuring all timber comes from FSC certified forests, companies like Wyevale can ensure their timber products come from environmentally and socially responsible sources  
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**Greenpeace's ancient forest campaign is committed to protecting the world's remaining ancient forests and the plants, animals and peoples that depend upon them.**

**We promote real alternatives such as timber products certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which ensures that timber comes from environmentally responsible and socially just forest management.**