

Responses to Company Statements Regarding Nyatoh Furniture

Nyatoh is a term used for wood of several different species of tree found in the Southeast Asia. The species include *Palaquium spp.*, but also some *Payena spp.* and *Ganua spp.* Local names include Njatuh (Indonesia), Jangkar (Sarawak), Bauvudi (Fiji islands), Nato (Philippines). In Malaysia the names Nyatoh Chontee and Nyatoh Malam are sometimes used to distinguish the lighter and heavier timber species usually grouped together as nyatoh. 'Bitis' is also sometimes used to refer to heavier species of the group.

While species marketed as nyatoh range from the Indian sub-continent through South East Asia as far as Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, most nyatoh exports are coming from Indonesia and to a lesser extent Malaysia and Papua New Guinea.

Many of the species called nyatoh in trade are listed on the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species as vulnerable, two as endangered and one critically endangered. *Palaquium impressinervium* from Peninsular Malaysia is listed as vulnerable, with the timber trade the main threat.

Nyatoh is not grown in plantations but is being logged from primary rainforests. Nyatoh been found being illegally logged in numerous reports and is considered one of the most valuable trees cut in Indonesia's rainforests. Illegal logging is rampant in Indonesia and the government has admitted that it is out of control. Reports estimate that illegal logging accounts for from 75% to 90% of exports. Nyatoh is an important food tree for endangered orangutans.

Company Claims

Target

In responses to letter sent by concerned customers, Target states:

"The Nyatoh wood for the merchandise sold by Target is obtained by our vendor from sustained growth forests. I'm sure you'll be pleased to know that the vendor is actively involved in a program of reforestation."

As stated above, nyatoh is not logged from sustainable operations. In fact, the Indonesian government has prevented the oversight of logging companies by certifiers accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the only organization whose standards are accepted by major environmental organizations and whose certifications include chain-of-custody tracking. The Indonesian government has, in cooperation with the timber industry, created its own certification program and has sought mutual recognition with the FSC. The FSC has refused to recognize the Indonesian certification scheme.

In response to Target's specific statement, natural rainforests are certainly "sustained growth forests", that is, until they are logged. Logging is the greatest direct cause of the destruction of rainforests in Southeast Asia. No logging of primary rainforests can be considered sustainable. Large trees in old growth tropical rainforests are typically 250 to 1000 years old.

There is no reforestation taking place in even legal concessions in Indonesia's forests. Even if there was, reforestation programs are irrelevant since the forests may have gone millions of years without major disturbance of the kind that comes with logging. A lead figure in Indonesia's forest industry during the Suharto regime was placed under house arrest for using funds meant for reforestation programs for personal use.

At least 75% of logging in Indonesia is being done illegally. Without chain-of-custody certification there's no way to know which supplier the wood came from much less which logging operation. Without such certification, Target can't even know if the wood logged for their furniture was logged legally much less from a low-impact operation.

Pottery Barn (owned by Williams-Sonoma)

In responses to letter from concerned customers, Williams-Sonoma states:

"Pottery Barn verifies all woods used for our furniture items are not listed as threatened on the World Conservation Monitoring Center's endangered species list (www.unep-wcmc.org).

William-Sonoma, Inc. will only work with business associates who certify wood used in their products have been legally harvested in compliance with all applicable local laws and regulations."

Numerous species sold as nyatoh are listed as threatened on the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species, the global standard. Overcutting is considered the reason for the threat to most of the species.

However, when it comes to rainforests, whether a particular tree species is considered endangered is not relevant. Logging of old growth rainforests adversely impacts the biodiversity of the entire forest, much of which has never been studied. For instance, studies in Brazil revealed that a single rainforest tree can provide a home to 1200 or more species of just beetles, many of which may be found in a very limited area. Logging in the tropics is eliminating thousands of unique species of wildlife each year.

Vendors selling to Williams-Sonoma may in fact "certify" that their products are coming from legal operations, but without independent certification and chain-of-custody tracking, there's just no way for them to know. Industry's self-certifications are useless.

Crate and Barrel

On Crate and Barrel's website the company states, "[a]t Crate and Barrel, we use only timber harvested from responsibly managed forests. Not only are our sources established and reliable, they share our commitment to and respect for the replenishment and ecological practices essential to sustain our natural forests."

Since Crate and Barrel is sourcing from Indonesia, the likelihood is that they are buying wood that has been illegally harvested. Even Indonesia's Forest Minister has admitted that illegal logging can't be controlled. Without independent certification that includes chain-of-custody tracking and verification, there's no way that Crate and Barrel can be sure from what logging operation the wood in their furniture has originated and therefore cannot know whether the logging was even legal much less "responsibly managed".

Timber and wood product exporting companies often lie about the sources of their products and assure their clients that they are committed to caring for the environment. However, unless that rhetoric is backed up with independent chain-of-custody certification, it's just words and is most often greenwash. When asked by their clients, every company exporting from Indonesia assures them that they are obtaining their products from sustainable sources. Yet, the government, under pressure from donors and environmental groups has admitted that 75% of exports are coming from illegal sources and being laundered through the mills. Clearly, the companies are not telling the truth.