

# Protecting the environment, communities and workers in UK supply chains

## The case of “Tainted timber” from Malaysia

March 2026

### Introduction

This briefing summarises new research showing the failure of Malaysian timber certification and links to UK supply chains, how the UK regulatory regime should be improved and what MPs can do to help.

The full report is available at <http://foe.uk/timber>.

The Department for Business and Trade’s current review of Responsible Business Conduct is an opportunity to put in place new measures to prevent human rights abuses and environmental harms being perpetuated in UK company and public sector supply chains.

### What’s the problem?

Systemic failures in Malaysia’s timber certification scheme mean ‘sustainability’ claims can’t be trusted. [Tainted Timber](#) – a new report by Friends of the Earth, Earthsight and RimbaWatch – has revealed that the main timber certification scheme in Malaysia is failing to protect precious tropical forests and the Indigenous communities and threatened wildlife that depend on them.



Malayan tiger (*Panthera tigris jacksoni*)  
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**UK companies may be importing Malaysian timber linked to harm to people and the environment.** The UK is the fifth largest importer of certified timber from Malaysia<sup>1</sup>. This timber is being labelled and mis-sold as “sustainable” despite being linked to deforestation, Indigenous rights violations and the destruction of critically endangered

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<sup>1</sup> Timber certified by the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme (MTCS) is endorsed by the international PEFC – one of the world’s top two timber certification systems, along with FSC.

Malayan tiger habitats. Our investigation of shipping data has identified UK companies, including major retailers, importing Malaysian timber in the form of doors, plywood and joinery products.

**The regulatory regime isn't strong enough.** The UK Timber Regulation only requires companies to carry out due diligence to ensure that no timber produced from illegal deforestation is imported into the UK, based on producer country laws. In Malaysia, these laws and governance are weak, particularly in relation to Indigenous peoples' rights. This, combined with the failure of timber certification outlined in our report, means that timber harvested unsustainably can still enter the UK from Malaysia.

**Loss of forests and wider biodiversity are a threat to UK national security.** Recent publication of the suppressed Joint Intelligence Committee report on the risks to national security from biodiversity breakdown is a stark reminder of humankind's dependence on the resilience of the natural world.

**Business must do better – time for government to step in.** The role of businesses is rightly under scrutiny. The current regulatory regime and voluntary industry action aren't working to stem the catastrophic loss of forests and wider environmental harm, the knock-on impacts on workers and Indigenous and local communities, and the threats to our national security. The government must now step in to ensure that the UK public and private sector are proactive in identifying, preventing and remedying such harms in their supply chains.



**“Our lives depend entirely on the forest. Once the Keruing trees are felled, we have no future. We lose our livelihood, we will not be able to earn money.”**

Omar, local Orang Asli Indigenous leader, Pahang, Malaysia

## What's the solution?

**Defra should carry out an urgent review into timber imports from Malaysia** to determine the extent to which timber certified as sustainable, but associated with the environmental harms and human rights abuses detailed in Friends of the Earth's [Tainted Timber](#) report, is entering UK company supply chains. Further recommendations for the government, the timber industry and certification bodies are detailed in the full report.

**More widely, the government should introduce a new Business, Human Rights and Environment Act** to ensure that UK growth and prosperity are built on foundations that uphold human rights, treat workers fairly and safeguard our environment.

**A new law has wide-ranging support.** It is called for by UK [civil society organisations](#) and trade unions (coordinated by the Corporate Justice Coalition), [businesses and investors](#), [over 70 Parliamentarians](#), and the public, with [145,000 petition-signers](#) and YouGov polling showing [four in five UK adults support new laws](#) requiring UK companies to prevent human rights abuses and serious environmental damage in their operations or supply chains.

**The UK must not be left behind.** Such legislation, based on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, is being brought forward in other countries including France, Germany and the EU – the UK risks being left behind if it fails to act.

### What's the opportunity?

The Department of Business and Trade is carrying out a review of **Responsible Business Conduct**, which is expected to report to Ministers imminently. The review was set up following acknowledgement in the [2025 Trade Strategy](#) that “...concerns continue to be raised regarding the effectiveness of the UK’s regime in preventing human rights, labour rights and environmental harms in supply chains.”

**This is a key opportunity to call for urgently needed new legislation** to ensure that UK company supply chains do not perpetuate human or worker rights abuses or environmental harm, here or overseas.

### What can MPs do?

1. **Join over [70 Parliamentarians](#) in signing the [Good Business Matters pledge](#)** in support of a new UK Business, Human Rights and Environment Act.
2. **Write to Sir Chris Bryant, Minister for Business and Trade**, asking him to champion the introduction of a Business, Human Rights and Environment Act as part of the government response to his department’s review of Responsible Business Conduct, and as a priority for the next King’s Speech.
3. **Attend and raise these issues in the Westminster Hall debate** tabled by Bambos Charalambous MP on “The need to safeguard human rights in supply chains to the UK”. The date has not yet been set, but it has been requested for mid-April, ahead of International Workers’ Day.
4. **Write to Environment Minister Mary Creagh** asking for an urgent review of Malaysian timber imports in response to the findings in Friends of the Earth’s [Tainted Timber](#) report.

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