

Tainted timber

Malaysian certification
failures and UK imports



Contents

Executive summary	3
Context	4
Indigenous rights and environmental violations in Peninsular Malaysia	6
Malaysian timber imports into the UK	12
Implications and recommendations	14
Glossary	17

Thanks to players of People's Postcode Lottery for providing vital funds to bring this research and its findings to life.

All images were taken by Albert Bansa in Peninsular Malaysia, both within forest reserves and in degazetted areas, unless otherwise stated.

Executive summary



This investigation reveals that timber, certified as “sustainable” under the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme (MTCS) and endorsed by the international Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), is entering the UK despite clear failures of these schemes to uphold Indigenous rights and prevent natural forest conversion and degradation, and the loss of other important habitat in Malaysia.

Our research demonstrates that MTCS standards are significantly weaker than those of the PEFC. Indigenous Orang Asli land rights, territories and land use are not recognised by the MTCS or by auditors, with little or no community consultation. Audits routinely ignore and dismiss formal complaints from Orang Asli Peoples, allowing commercial timber extraction and monoculture expansion to degrade intact natural forest reserves, which these communities inhabit and rely on under customary tenureship systems.

Certification is also failing to prevent widespread deforestation. Within certified forests, PEFC rules limit the conversion of forest to other land uses to 5% of the certified area. This has been exceeded in the states of Pahang and Kedah. Most of the forest conversion in Peninsular Malaysia has targeted intact natural forests within forest reserves and is even taking place in government-recognised environmentally sensitive areas, both also against MTCS guidelines.

Globally, important forests are being destroyed, threatening the communities and wildlife dependent on them. We document logging in Class I Tiger Conservation Landscapes and Central Forest Spine corridors, despite the threat to the critically endangered Malayan tiger, which is classified as Totally Protected under Malaysian law, with fewer than 150 individuals remaining. In addition, over 4,000 hectares of forest were cleared in areas meant to connect vital wildlife habitats.

This investigation connects these failures to Malaysian timber entering UK markets. Reliance on PEFC/MTCS certification means timber is often being labelled as “sustainable” despite its potential links to deforestation and Indigenous rights abuses.

The UK is a key importer of Malaysian timber. From December 2024 to November 2025¹, trade data revealed UK timber imports from Malaysia included 40,588 cubic metres of plywood, while shipment data for the whole of 2025 recorded over 291,000 doors from 5 leading Malaysian manufacturers. Substantial recipients include Howdens, International Plywood Ltd, Travis Perkins, Leader Online, and Caledonian Plywood.

UK timber imports are governed by the UK Timber Regulations (UKTR), which specify that any “operator” placing timber on UK markets must ensure adequate due diligence, so that illegally produced timber is not imported. However, the UKTR does not prohibit the import of wood from areas that are legally deforested, regardless of the environmental or social harms associated with its production.

Timber certification by recognised bodies such as the PEFC is one of the key tools used by UK companies to help assess UKTR compliance. These certification bodies purport to provide assurance of sustainability to enable commercial entities to meet the higher standards that customers, and good practice, require. The PEFC defines minimum sustainability standards that must be met, such as respect for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities’ land rights, and their Free Prior and Informed Consent for activities on their land. Our report demonstrates that the way MTCS standards are implemented fails even to meet the basic standards required by the PEFC.

¹Latest UK trade data available at time of writing.

Image: Kedah, Malaysia



To address these systemic failures, the UK government must:

- Urgently review legislation governing timber imports.
- Suspend Malaysian timber imports pending a thorough review of MTCS standards.
- Introduce a new **Business, Human Rights and Environment Act** that mandates due diligence beyond voluntary certification and includes all deforestation, environmental and social harms.

“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

Context

THE SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report summarises the failings of timber certification in Peninsular Malaysia (separate from the states of Sarawak and Sabah on the island of Borneo) and the links to and implications for the UK timber industry. It draws on **The Trouble with Timber**, a detailed analysis of human rights and environmental violations in certified forest management areas. It investigates timber imports by UK companies and their Malaysian suppliers. And it provides recommendations for government and industry to clean up timber supply chains.

The Trouble with Timber builds on **Lost in Certification**, a 2023 research report that details timber certification failings in Sarawak. Together, they provide a compelling analysis of the systemic failure of timber certification across Malaysia.

MALAYSIAN FORESTS AND TIMBER PRODUCTION

Malaysia is one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots. It contains exceptionally rich ecosystems, including tropical rainforests, complex peat swamp systems and crucial ecological corridors that support globally important biodiversity and climate stability. These landscapes are fundamental to Indigenous Orang Asli communities that depend on the land for their identity, livelihoods and cultural survival.

Malaysia is a major global producer and exporter of tropical timber and timber products, with MTCS-certified exports of around **184,000 cubic metres** in 2024. East Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah on the Island of Borneo) generally supplies East Asia, while Peninsular Malaysia mainly supplies the UK and Europe.

From 2002 to 2024, Malaysia lost 3 million hectares (Mha) of humid primary forest. Malaysian forest cover was estimated at around 18 Mha in 2020. Deforestation has slowed in recent years, but in 2024 it lost 100,000 hectares (ha) of natural **forests**. The growth of industrial timber plantations is estimated to be driving **76%** of all threats to natural forests in Malaysia.



Image: Pahang, Malaysia

TIMBER CERTIFICATION IN MALAYSIA

Approximately **6.3 million hectares (35% of the total 18 Mha)** of Malaysia's natural forest area is certified under the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme (MTCS), which is endorsed internationally by the international Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). The other main certification scheme, the Forestry Stewardship Scheme (FSC), certifies around 3%. This report focuses on MTCS and PEFC.

Certification plays an important role in global trade, with companies relying on it as a key indicator to demonstrate that timber has been sourced responsibly when undertaking due diligence.

In principle, certification schemes should guarantee sustainable forest management, environmental protection and respect for Indigenous rights. However, in practice, there's growing evidence of systemic failure.

Focusing on Sarawak on the island of Borneo, the 2023 report **Lost in Certification** documented failures of both MTCS standards and audits. These demonstrated the Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC, the body which oversees MTCS) and PEFC repeatedly failed to guarantee their own standards and enforce compliance, while the auditing body SIRIM QAS International (SIRIM) proved incapable of effectively monitoring and

enforcing standards. The MTCC complaints mechanism was found to be severely flawed and inaccessible to remote communities, Indigenous complaints were mishandled and audits were inaccurate. Importantly, there was no clear threshold for termination or suspension of MTCS certificates, allowing companies to repeatedly fail to meet standards without consequences.

This new investigation extends that analysis by providing evidence of MTCS failures in Peninsular Malaysia, demonstrating that these incidents are not isolated, but indicative of a system that is structurally incapable of safeguarding forest ecosystems or Indigenous rights.

In Peninsular Malaysia, Forest Management Units (FMUs) are defined as the entirety of the states' Permanent Reserved Forest, with each FMU between 155,000 and 1.6 million ha in size – generally covering much larger areas than in the states of East Malaysia in Borneo. These FMUs are certified under the MTCS. To be certified, FMUs and their forest managers must be audited by SIRIM – which is a government-linked company owned by the Malaysian Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry. The forests are managed by the respective states' forestry departments under the authority of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability. Therefore, both the auditors and the forest managers are under the authority of the Malaysian government, a clear conflict of interest.

Indigenous rights and environmental violations in Peninsular Malaysia

MTCS certification has repeatedly failed to recognise and protect the territorial rights of Indigenous Orang Asli communities, prevent ecological loss in globally important forests, address water security and flood risks, and ensure transparency and accountability.

The map in figure 1 illustrates a selection of impacts and violations in FMUs. For each example, the corresponding page in *The Trouble with Timber* report is given, where further detail can be found.



Image: Rafflesia cantleyi © Chien Lee

Map key

% of industrial timber plantations which are classified as undisturbed forests and should be protected according to PEFC

FMU (Forestry Management Unit)

Forest Reserves

Central Forest Spine Ecological Linkages



Degradation of habitats

The **Central Forest Spine (CFS)** initiative spans several states, protecting threatened species including the Malayan tiger, Asian elephant, and Malayan tapir. Yet satellite analysis shows over 4,000 ha of tree cover lost between 2021 and 2023 in CFS Ecological Linkages, mostly in **Terengganu** (p39). Class I Tiger Conservation Landscapes within FMUs also lost 65,816 ha of tree cover (2021-23) (p35). This has contributed to pushing the Malayan tiger towards extinction, with fewer than 150 remaining, down from 3,000 in the 1950s.

Ecosystem degradation

In the **South-East Pahang Peat Swamp Forest**, Asia's largest contiguous peat swamp forest, 2,734 hectares of forest was lost in MTCS-certified FMUs between 2021 and 2023, almost 3% of the total forest size (p35). These ecosystems regulate water, store carbon and provide wildfire buffers, yet certification audits failed to recognise the impacts of logging on this critically important habitat.

Misleading statements on Indigenous presence

Auditors have falsely claimed certified areas have no Indigenous communities, such as in **Selangor**, despite it having at least 2 existing Indigenous land claims (p22). In **Pahang**, auditors falsely claimed the Orang Asli didn't practice "traditional forest-related knowledge" (p22). In **Perak**, auditors stated forest managers supported Indigenous land rights, despite the then-Chief Minister of Perak erroneously stating, "there is no such thing as "ancestral land for Orang Asli under the state constitution" (p21).

Water security and flood risks

MTCS-certified logging has occurred in a key water catchment serving the states of Penang and Kedah, next to UNESCO biosphere reserves and in Environmentally Sensitive Areas crucial for regulating water flow, maintaining environmental quality and ensuring human safety. In **Kedah**, the 2022 Iboi village flood killed 3 people and destroyed houses. It was linked to clearance upstream of an industrial timber plantation in the FMU (p40).

Indigenous communities' rights ignored

Auditors have regularly disregarded Indigenous communities' land rights, legal challenges and protests. Despite highly publicised Indigenous-led blockades against logging in **Perak** in 2019 and a court case involving over 127 Indigenous plaintiffs, auditors claimed there were no disputes, complaints or court cases about Indigenous land rights (p21). Auditors frequently failed to visit these communities and discuss their objections. In **Terengganu**, no Indigenous communities were visited between 2021 and 2024 (p24).

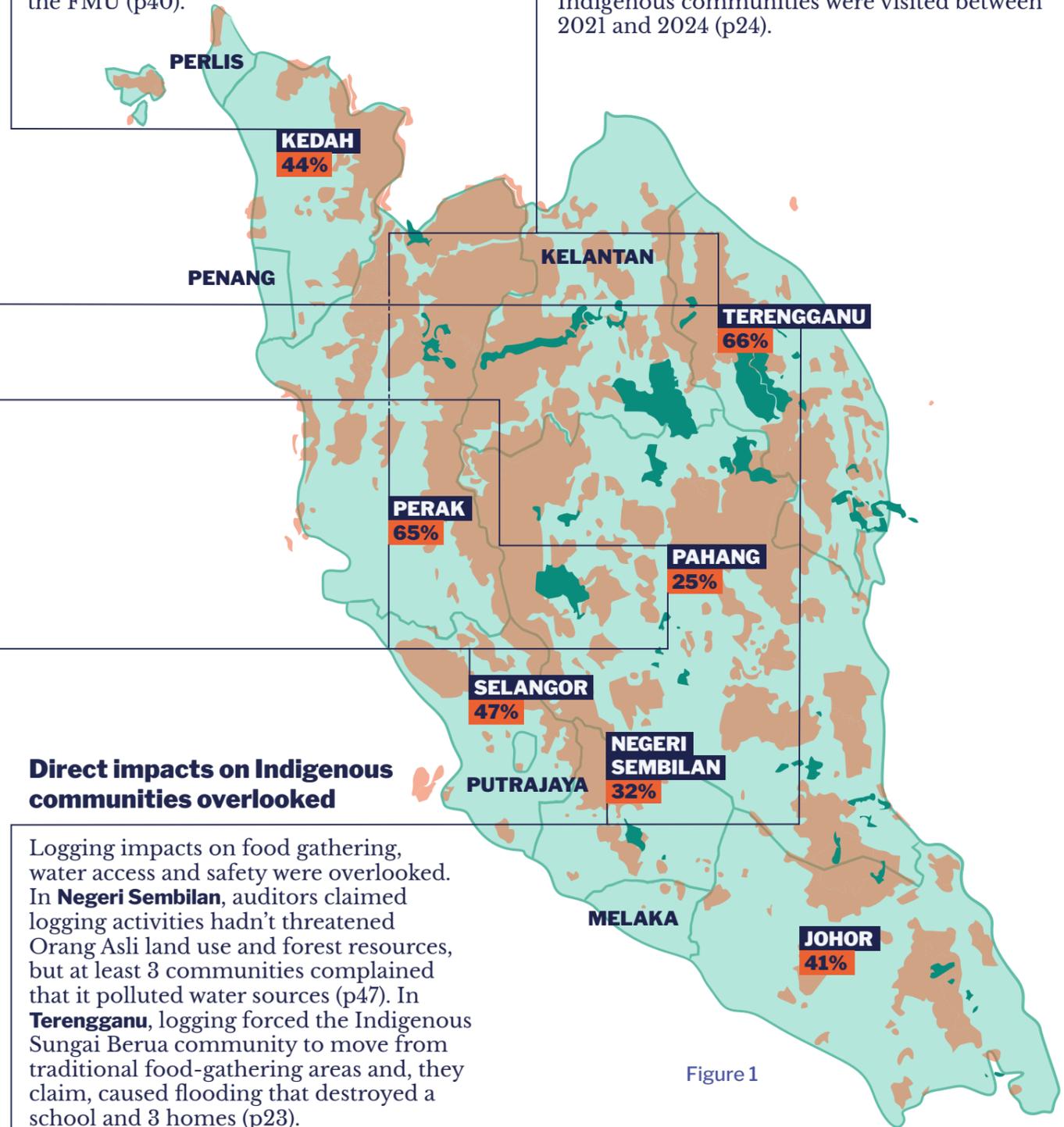


Figure 1

Direct impacts on Indigenous communities overlooked

Logging impacts on food gathering, water access and safety were overlooked. In **Negeri Sembilan**, auditors claimed logging activities hadn't threatened Orang Asli land use and forest resources, but at least 3 communities complained that it polluted water sources (p47). In **Terengganu**, logging forced the Indigenous Sungai Berua community to move from traditional food-gathering areas and, they claim, caused flooding that destroyed a school and 3 homes (p23).

VIOLATIONS OF INDIGENOUS TERRITORIAL RIGHTS

Analysis of the MTCS standard shows that it's severely lacking in its recognition and protection of Indigenous rights, in a national context where legal recognition of Traditional Territories in Peninsular Malaysia is extremely limited.

Both the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and PEFC standards explicitly require recognition of Indigenous territories "beyond" legal frameworks. The PEFC states that "legal, customary and traditional rights related to the forest land shall be clarified, recognised and respected" with a clear requirement for Free, Prior and Informed consent (FPIC). Despite this, the MTCS standard contains multiple indicators that contradict this principle, often requiring legal documentation and failing to adequately recognise customary territories and traditional land-use patterns. Our analysis demonstrates that the certification auditors SIRIM repeatedly ignored broader land rights and the requirement for FPIC when assessing FMUs.

As a result, FMU managers and logging companies violate land rights, consultation is superficial or absent, complaints are ignored and audit reports directly contradict documented evidence.

Auditors have even misrepresented Orang Asli communities in their audit reports. These include claiming they "no longer practice traditional forest-related knowledge" or have no land claims in some FMUs. At the same time, auditors conduct little to no consultation with communities themselves, preferring to interview JAKOA, the controversial government agency in charge of Orang Asli affairs.



Orang Asli, the Indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia

The Orang Asli are a diverse population of around 210,000 people, comprising 3 main ethnic groups and 18 sub-groups. They've lived in traditional territories defined by customary land rights for many generations, and their lifestyle, culture and livelihoods are intimately connected to their territories. The key law governing their land rights is the Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954, which grants rights at the discretion of the State. Legal recognition of Orang Asli land rights is restricted to "settlement" recognised on just 33,000 ha of land. This is a fraction of the 151,000 hectares the government has identified as under Orang Asli habitation, itself only part of the total territory claimed by the Orang Asli. There is often no acknowledgement of other traditional land uses such as foraging and spiritual sites. Even areas with legal recognition are not secure, as the Malaysian government can revoke this recognition at any time, a privilege it has exercised in the past.



Image: Orang Asli Indigenous people Pahang, Malaysia

"My hope is that our village and our farms will be excised from the Forest Reserve. That is my greatest hope."

- Ismail, activist within the Orang Asli community, Pahang, Malaysia (pictured left)



ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLATIONS

Water security and flood risk

Certification has also failed to protect communities from water insecurity and increased flooding linked to forest degradation. Certified logging has occurred in water catchments, and in several areas audited under MTCS, residents reported deteriorating water quality and reduced access to clean water. In at least 2 cases (the Orang Asli settlement of Sungai Berua and the Iboi village flood disaster in 2022), the loss of upstream forest caused severe flooding that destroyed homes and led to loss of life. SIRIM audit reports failed to recognise these impacts.

Ecological loss in globally important forests

Malaysia's certified forests include ecosystems of exceptional biodiversity and climate importance. From tiger habitat to peat swamp and UNESCO landscapes, MTCS certification has failed to protect these habitats, which are critical for Indigenous peoples, wildlife and climate regulation.

Tiger habitats degraded inside certified area

The Malayan tiger is a national symbol of Malaysia and classified as Totally Protected under Malaysian law. It's critically endangered and being pushed toward extinction, with fewer than 150 individuals remaining from a population of 3,000 in the 1950s. Peninsular Malaysia contains one of the largest Tiger Conservation Landscapes in Asia and the survival of the species depends on maintaining intact habitat and wildlife corridors.

However, satellite analysis shows that within certified forests, 65,816 ha of tree cover was lost in Class 1 Tiger Conservation Landscapes between 2021 and 2023, destroying critical tiger habitat. And more than 4,000 ha was cleared within Central Forest Spine Ecological Linkages meant to connect vital wildlife habitats. Malaysia's forests are critical to the survival of the species, but certification is failing to protect it.

Image: Malayan tiger (*Panthera tigris jacksoni*), shot in wild by means of a custom DSLR camera trap © Chien Lee

Forest cover loss

PEFC and MTCC criteria state that forest conversion (human-induced change of forest to non-forest uses) within FMUs should be restricted to no more than 5% of the forest area, and should not have negative impacts on ecologically important forest areas. Additionally MTCC state that forest conversion should target only severely degraded areas.

Satellite analysis shows these criteria are not being met, with primary forests cleared inside MTCS-certified areas. In several FMUs, the majority of forest conversion targeted undisturbed natural forest rather than degraded land. In Terengganu and Perak, around two-thirds of the area targeted for conversion was intact forest (66% and 65% respectively). In Kedah, nearly half of proposed conversion (44%) targeted undisturbed forest.

In some cases, the overall scale of conversion also exceeds the 5% limit mentioned above. In Pahang, 6.6% of the certified FMU, nearly 100,000 ha, has or is planned to be converted. In Kedah, this figure is 5.4% of the FMU (18,468 ha). These figures alone are sufficient to demonstrate that conversion under MTCS is not limited, controlled or compliant with international standards.

Widespread forest loss has major impacts on Indigenous communities that are dependent on intact forests, as well as ecological consequences, like habitat loss and degradation, with resulting harm to wildlife.

Transparency and accountability failings

Across Peninsular Malaysia, MTCS-certified FMUs operate with little to no transparency. Environmental Impact Assessments are legally required, yet often not published, so the public cannot see how environmental risks are being assessed. Only brief, vague summaries of Forest Management Plans are publicly available, with no maps of Orang Asli reserves, High Conservation Value or any other spatial classifications, making it impossible to independently verify whether environmental safeguards and legal requirements are being met.

Oversight by the auditors, SIRIM, is equally weak, which is exacerbated by the MTCC failing to provide a robust complaints and appeals system, as required by PEFC standards. Instead, MTCC offers a minimal, fragmented and confusing system, with no transparency.

Complaints made by Indigenous communities about land-rights violations are repeatedly dismissed.

This leaves SIRIM audits of the MTCS functionally unaccountable and structurally unable to detect or prevent violations, as there's no process to have complaints adequately or independently assessed by either SIRIM, the MTCC or the PEFC.



Images: Kedah, Malaysia (above)
Pahang, Malaysia (below)

Malaysian timber imports into the UK

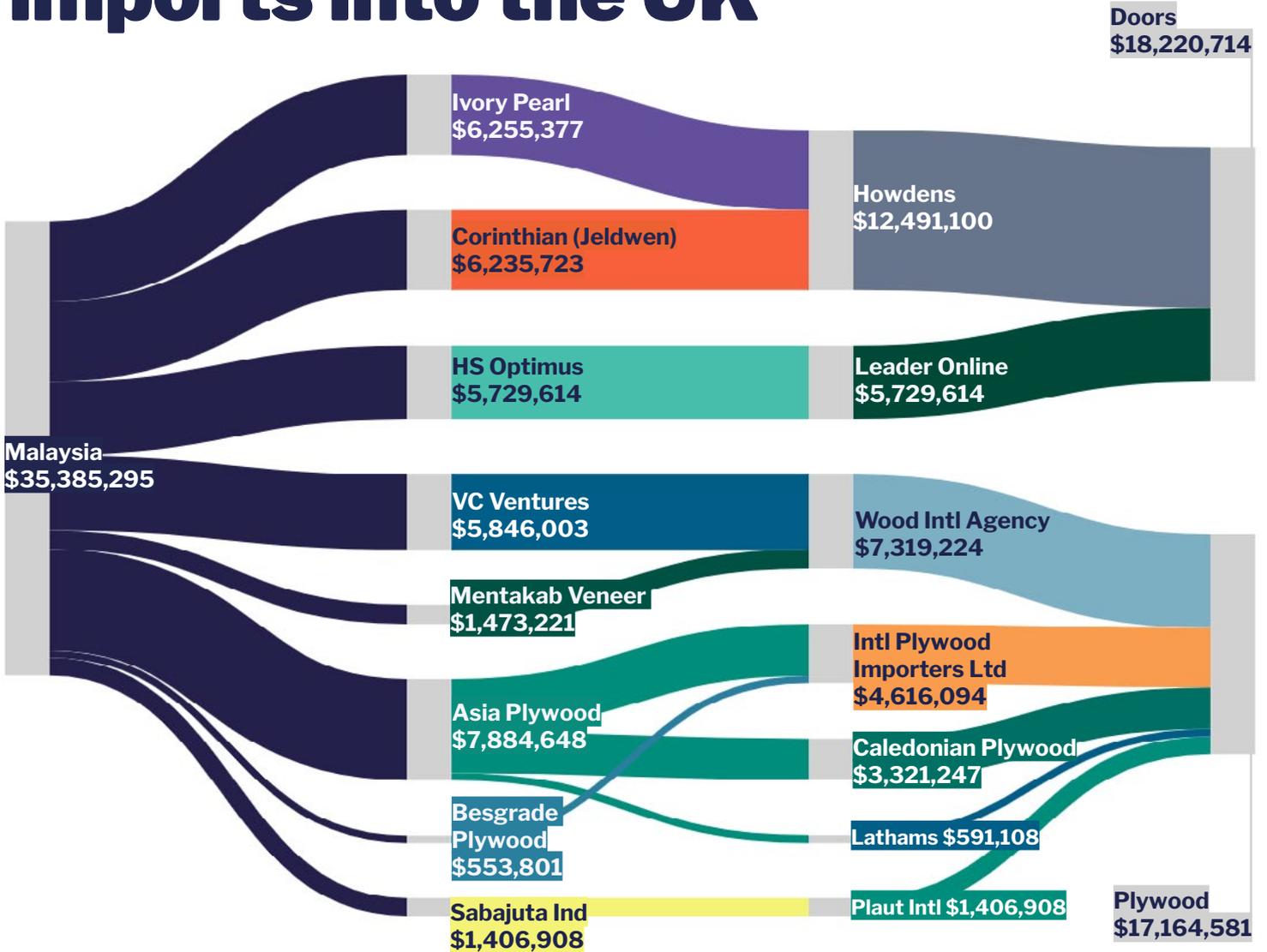


Figure 2

Top 10 supply chains for wood product (HS44) exports made from or containing tropical timber from Malaysia to the UK, Jan-December 2025 (these trade flows may also contain some non-MTCS timber, non-tropical timber and timber sourced from outside of Malaysia). Trade values (US\$) declared to Malaysian Customs at point of export. Retail values of the goods in the UK can be expected to be multiple times these amounts.

Company responses to information requests confirmed they import or trade in tropical timber products from Malaysia, as well as details of their due diligence procedures and their use of PEFC/FSC certification as a key sustainability indicator – often stipulating certification as an essential requirement².

²Further information can be found in our accompanying appendix **Tainted timber methodology**. All named companies, with the exception of Wood International Agency Ltd, confirmed Malaysia as a source country for timber products and their use of PEFC certification.

UK IMPORTS OF MALAYSIAN TIMBER

The UK was the world’s joint fifth largest importer of certified timber from Malaysia in 2024, accounting for 5% of Malaysia’s **MTCS exports** (by volume). This amounted to 7,859 cubic metres, down from 18,706 cubic metres in 2023. The principal categories of **UK imports of Malaysian wood** by weight in 2023 were wooden furniture (44%), plywood (27%) and builders’ joinery, including wooden doors (12%). Together, this represented almost 10% of Malaysia’s total exports by value of builders’ joinery and carpentry.

Full Malaysia-UK data on company exports/imports is difficult to access. However, we were able to obtain shipment records for January to December 2025. Our analysis gave us a

snapshot of trade flows, with movement of (non-furniture) Malaysian timber into the UK concentrated in a relatively small number of Malaysian suppliers and UK recipients. This identified the top 10 supply chains that include tropical wood, involving 8 Malaysian exporters and 7 UK companies, accounting for 65% of bilateral trade by value (see figure 2).

Of these companies Howdens and Leader Online primarily imported wooden doors, with Howdens alone sourcing approximately 139,000³ individual doors.

The other 5 UK companies, importing or trading Malaysian plywood and builders joinery, were International Plywood Ltd, Caledonian Plywood, Wood International Agency, Plaut International and Lathams. They principally sourced from 5 leading Malaysian companies, including VC Ventures and Asia Plywood. Travis Perkins, the UK's largest builders' merchant, sourced certified tropical timber from Malaysia, via International Plywood.⁴

³Estimate by weight at 42 kg per door.

⁴Travis Perkins' 'preferred supplier' is International Plywood. Travis Perkins' online sales information in 2025 indicated VC Ventures as the source of their Malaysian marine plywood, suggesting they were the recipient of a large proportion of VC Ventures' plywood imports to the UK.

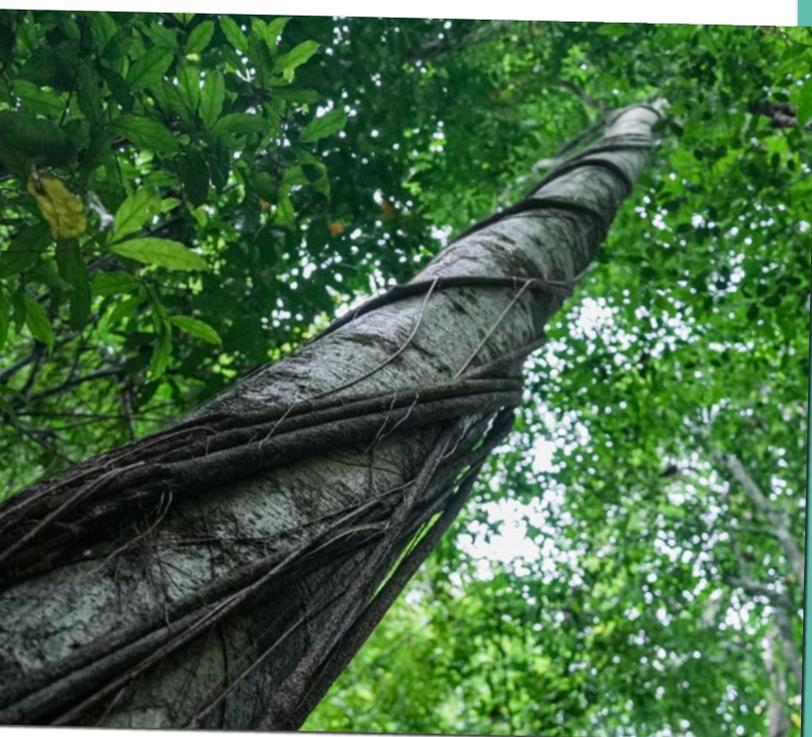


Image: Kedah, Malaysia

METHODOLOGY

We undertook an analysis of Malaysian timber exports to the UK to identify UK importers and their Malaysian suppliers.

Shipment records were analysed for the period January to December 2025 for all HS Code 44 (wood and wood products) shipments from Malaysia to the UK. This HS code includes timber, joinery and wood flooring, but excludes pulp, paper, paper products and wooden furniture.

There are significant exports of wooden furniture from Malaysia to the UK, but this was excluded from analysis as it's mostly made from plantation-grown wood (especially rubberwood) or imported non-tropical wood (eg, pine or oak), and our analysis of violations in FMUs focused only on tropical timber from natural forests, not plantations. Also, timber for furniture typically passes through multiple operators, making it near impossible to trace to source.

The dataset identifies exporters, importers, product categories, shipment volumes and declared "Free on Board" values at the point of export. Shipment records were cross-referenced with UK company information and product ranges.

Leading companies identified in shipment records were contacted for further information on their Malaysian timber supply chains and due diligence processes. We also reviewed publicly available company information and sustainability disclosures.

Annual Malaysian exports were also taken from publicly available [trade statistics](#).

For more detailed information on the datasets see appendix [Tainted timber methodology](#).

Implications and recommendations

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UK TIMBER SECTOR

Malaysian companies certified under MTCS gain PEFC recognition, and with it, access to global markets that require PEFC certification. The certification failures on the ground in Malaysia set out in this report have significant implications for the UK market.

UK timber imports are governed by the UK Timber Regulations (UKTR), which require any “operator” to undertake due diligence to ensure that no illegally produced timber is placed on the UK market. Regulations are enforced by the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) on behalf of the Environment Department (DEFRA). Timber certification by recognised bodies such as the PEFC is routinely used by UK companies as a key indicator of sustainability.

We haven’t identified cases of illegal timber extraction under Malaysian law and we’re not accusing UK companies of acting illegally. But our report shows that serious environmental harms and human rights violations are perpetuated through a combination of outdated Malaysian legislation that fails to protect Indigenous rights and lax MTCS standards

that allow harms to take place under a cloak of “certification”.

Our report demonstrates that the MTCS fails even to meet the basic standards required by the PEFC. The endorsement of the MTCS by the PEFC gives international credibility to a certification system that is failing on the ground. This endorsement allows Malaysian timber to enter global markets, including the UK, as “sustainably sourced” while there’s clear evidence of harm taking place in certified forests.

All but one of the companies identified in this report have confirmed to us that they use PEFC/MTCS as part of their wider due diligence⁵. Therefore, unless additional due diligence checks conducted are robust enough to identify the serious failings with MTCS, such as outlined in this report, there is a risk that some UK companies may be purchasing timber products from Malaysia that are linked to deforestation, ecosystem degradation and/or Indigenous rights violations. And by accepting MTCS/PEFC at face value, importing countries risk undermining their own environmental and human rights commitments. This could ultimately lead to UK consumers buying products that are incorrectly labelled as sustainable, when they are not.

⁵See appendix [Tainted timber methodology](#) for more detail on company responses.



Image: Pahang, Malaysia



RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of our findings of systemic failures of MTCS and PEFC certification, we make the following recommendations:

UK government action

Launch an urgent investigation into the regulation of timber imports from Malaysia

The UK regulator (the OPSS) has treated Malaysian timber imports as low risk to date. Given the evidence of certification failures, DEFRA must investigate to what extent timber that is harming Indigenous communities and the environment in Malaysia is entering the UK and must strengthen regulatory enforcement.

Suspend acceptance of MTCS and PEFC standards for Malaysian timber

Temporarily suspend any endorsement or acceptance of both MTCS and PEFC standards for sustainable timber certification from Malaysia, until forest management practices recommended in [The Trouble with Timber report](#) are reviewed. And work with the Malaysian government and certification bodies to ensure these reviews take place.

Strengthen the UK Timber Regulations

The UKTR should be amended to cover all forms of deforestation, not just that deemed illegal under producer country laws, as well

as other environmental and human rights harms such as violations of land rights, as **recommended** by the Environmental Audit Committee. This would improve regulatory alignment with the EU Deforestation Regulation, benefiting businesses that export wood products to the EU, including products made with imported raw materials, where they are already working towards compliance.

Introduce a UK Business, Human Rights and Environment Act

Voluntary certification is failing communities and the environment around the world. A UK **Business, Human Rights and Environment Act** would require companies to identify, prevent and remedy environmental and human rights harms in their supply chains, rather than relying on weak producer-country legislation and flawed sustainability labels. And it would allow affected communities to seek justice in UK courts if harm occurs. There's **broad support** for such a law from businesses, parliamentarians, civil societies, trade unions and the public.

Image: Pahang, Malaysia

International action

PEFC must suspend its endorsement of the MTCS until systemic reforms are made

PEFC endorsement gives the MTCS international credibility, enabling timber from high-risk areas to be sold as “sustainable”. This endorsement should be paused until the MTCS can demonstrate effective safeguards for biodiversity and Indigenous rights.

The Malaysian government should review forestry practices against global best-practice standards

A transparent assessment and far-reaching reforms are needed to align Malaysia’s forestry governance with UN Indigenous rights principles, climate commitments and biodiversity obligations. And to address its multiple failings, particularly the absence of legal recognition of Indigenous territories.

SIRIM QAS, the notified certification body for the MTCS/PEFC, should be suspended as a certified body for the MTCS until its alignment with PEFC standards has been fully reviewed.

Detailed recommendations for immediate action and thorough revision of policies and practices of the Malaysian government, the PEFC and the MTCS can be found in [The Trouble with Timber report](#).

The MTCC has an immediate opportunity to adopt these recommendations in full in its current revision of standards, which opened in January 2026.

Timber industry action

UK trade bodies should issue risk alerts on MTCS/PEFC timber and strengthen due diligence guidance

Industry groups must ensure members understand the risks of relying on MTCS/PEFC certification and support more robust sourcing practices.

UK companies must go beyond certification

Companies importing and using Malaysian timber should investigate their supply chains in the light of these findings, acknowledge MTCS/PEFC failures and recognise weak national legislation, especially around Indigenous rights. They should adopt enhanced due diligence, including suspending suppliers where necessary, until they can verify that timber is not linked to environmental harm or Indigenous rights violations.

UK companies should ensure monitoring and site visits incorporate assessment of risks identified in this report, beyond the existing legality requirement under the UKTR.

Support a strengthened UK regulatory regime

UK companies and trade bodies should support calls for strengthened UK Timber Regulations that align with the EU Deforestation Regulation, as well as a [Business, Human Rights and Environment Act](#). These would level the playing field and ensure high standards of human rights and environmental protection in relation to UK supply chains.



**“We have to preserve the forest.
We must not destroy the forest.”**

**- Nizam, traditional honey gatherer
in Kedah, Malaysia**

Glossary

Conversion – human-induced change of natural forest to non-natural forest uses.

Intact forest – or Intact Forest Landscape, is a large, unbroken expanse of natural forest that shows no significant human disturbance and is big enough to maintain its full range of biodiversity and ecological processes.

Undisturbed forest – a natural forest that shows no visible signs of recent human disturbance, especially industrial activities.

Primary forest – a natural forest that has never been cleared or significantly altered by humans and has developed naturally over long periods (can be smaller in area than intact forest).

Natural forest - Naturally regenerating forest, predominantly composed of trees established through natural regeneration.

Forest reserve or Permanent Reserved

Forest – areas legally gazetted (officially designated) for forestry purposes, which can include management for conservation, recreation as well as “sustainable” timber extraction.

FMU (Forestry Management Unit) – a defined area of forest that is managed as a single entity. MTCS certificates are issued to FMUs.

MTCS (Malaysian Timber Certification

Scheme) – the country’s main timber sustainability scheme, and endorsed by the international system, the PEFC.

MTCC (Malaysian Timber Certification

Council) – the body established to manage the MTCS

PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification)

– the world’s largest forest certification system by area. It works by endorsing national certification systems, like MTCS.

SIRIM QAS International – a government-linked company that’s the main certification and audit body in Malaysia. It’s authorised to certify companies and forest units under the MTCS. It issues certificates that carry the PEFC logo, because the MTCS is PEFC-endorsed.

Who we are

Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

is dedicated to the protection of the natural world and the wellbeing of everyone in it. We've been campaigning for over 50 years to hold governments and corporations accountable for environmental harm.

RimbaWatch is an environmental think tank conducting research and advocacy on climate-related issues in Maritime Southeast Asia, with particular focus on forestry and energy governance in Malaysia.

EarthSight is a non-profit organization that uses in-depth investigations to expose environmental and social crime, injustice and the ties to global consumption.

Together, we're exposing the failures of timber certification and calling for strengthened regulation to protect forests and communities.

For more information visit foe.uk/timber

