

# INVESTIGATOR

Spring • 2020

 ENVIRONMENTAL  
INVESTIGATION  
AGENCY



## Coronavirus - a warning to drastically change our relationship with the natural world

Supermarkets dump 14  
aircraft carriers' worth of  
plastic a year on the UK

Palm oil watchdog's  
sustainability guarantee again  
exposed as a destructive con

Climate Week highlights our  
work on an existential threat  
to the future of humanity





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## INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to the Spring 2020 Investigator magazine.

As I'm sure none of you need telling, the world has become a very different place since our last issue, with more than a third of the global population under lockdown due to the coronavirus.

Despite major changes to the way we work, our dedicated campaigners and support staff have proven highly adaptable so that our global advocacy is able to continue.

However, there's no escaping the fact that EIA's work is significantly impacted by the pandemic and more than ever we rely on your generous donations. Our Fundraising team is available via phone and email, so please stay in touch.

Our heartfelt thanks – and stay safe out there.

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## Supermarkets dump 14 aircraft carriers' worth of plastic a year on the UK!

Our latest supermarkets plastic packaging survey made a huge splash in November when it revealed the amount produced has risen to more than 900,000 tonnes a year – nearly same weight as 14 Royal Navy QEII aircraft carriers.

Checking Out on Plastics II: Breakthroughs and backtracking from supermarkets, produced with Greenpeace, revealed that seven of the top 10 UK supermarkets had increased the plastic packaging they use.

Only Waitrose, Tesco and

Sainsbury's managed to make small reductions.

Also alarming was a steep rise in sales of so-called 'bags for life', with millions of shoppers buying them as a single-use option even though they contain far more plastic than conventional carriers.

Above: Bags for Life - or Bags for a Week?

## A billion plastic bottles flying off the shelves

Our *Checking Out on Plastics II* survey also revealed that plastic pollution from bottled water sales is soaring, with UK supermarkets selling almost a billion plastic water bottles in 2018.

Sales of plastic water bottles were up 8.2 per cent from the six leading supermarkets.

None of the top 10 UK supermarkets offer water dispensers across all stores for customers to refill reusable bottles.

We are calling for retailers to drastically cut plastic water bottle sales and install water dispensers in store. They should also force brands to offer soft drinks from refill stations. ●

Right: Plastic bottles cause consistent pollution everywhere



In 2019, 10 supermarkets representing 94.4 per cent of the grocery retail market reported selling an astonishing 1.5 billion bags for life – that’s a staggering 22 bags each per head of population in the country.

We’re urging supermarkets to work towards eliminating single-use plastic altogether by offering packaging-free products or switching to reusable and refillable packaging. False solutions – such as swapping plastic for cardboard or simply making plastic thinner – are unacceptable.

On launch day, Ocean Campaigner Juliet Phillips said: “It’s shocking to see that despite unprecedented awareness of the pollution crisis, the amount of single-use plastic used by the UK’s biggest supermarkets has actually increased in the past year.

“Our survey shows that grocery retailers need to tighten up targets to drive real reductions in single-use packaging and items. We need to address our throwaway culture at root through systems change, not materials change – substituting one single-use material for another is not the solution.”

The survey revealed the big brands supplying supermarkets were a driving factor behind the rise in plastic packaging, indicating supermarkets had failed to compel suppliers to take action.

Another factor in the rising volume of plastic packaging was that supermarkets which saw their sales grow last year failed to cut plastic along the way, meaning that by selling more goods they inevitably sold more plastic too. ●



## OCEAN NEWS IN BRIEF

- In March, the European Commission unveiled a plan to curb plastic pollution as part of its Circular Economy Action Plan – we welcomed it as a step in the right direction but warned it will only be effective if strongly implemented.
- We have again supported March’s annual Great Global Nurdle Hunt, a citizen science project documenting the tiny plastic pellets polluting beaches.

## Working to protect whales and dolphins from ghost fishing gear

Ghost gear is discarded, lost or abandoned fishing gear and it's the deadliest form of marine debris in our oceans.

In October, Senior Ocean Campaigner Christina Dixon was in Dakar, Senegal, as an expert participant for a workshop to tackle ghost gear in Africa.



Cluttering up the seas, ghost gear is responsible for entangling marine wildlife and depleting fishing stocks – and comprises a staggering 10 per cent of all marine litter.

The UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) held

Above left through right: ghost nets are indiscriminate killers

## UK not doing enough to tackle root causes of plastic pollution

A report in September was critical of the UK Government for not putting enough emphasis on reducing single-use plastic food and drink packaging.

Our expert campaigners, who fed into the review and gave evidence at a Parliamentary Select Committee hearing, agreed.

Ocean Campaigner Juliet Phillips said: "To date, far too little Government attention has been given to addressing the root causes of the pollution crisis by challenging our unsustainable single-use society.

Right: A rare plastic-free, refillable shopping area in a UK supermarket

"EIA urges the Government to take note of the report's findings through introducing a strategy to catalyse a wholesale transition away from wasteful and unnecessary single-use packaging and towards reusable and refillable solutions." ●





workshops in 2019 to build the capacity of governments, regional fisheries organisations and NGOs to tackle this growing threat to food security and ocean health.

The workshop in Dakar was the third of four bringing people together from across the African continent.

Christina shared advice on reuse and recycling of fishing gear, highlighting examples of both commercial and artisanal fisheries, projects to turn fishing gear into a resource and to preventing dumping and irresponsible disposal.

Bringing fishing gear into the circular economy is a key way to reduce the amount of gear ending up in our oceans. ●

## Unilever must shift from throwaway business model

Below: Just some of Unilever's products

In October, we welcomed a move by consumer goods giant Unilever to drastically slash its use of plastics by half – and urged the company to achieve it via a wholesale reduction in single-use packaging.

The name behind such household brands as Dove, Persil and PG Tips committed to halve its use of new plastic by 2025 and to collect and reuse more plastic than it sells.

Ocean Campaigner Juliet Phillips appeared on BBC World Business News to discuss the announcement, urging Unilever to ensure its drastic plastic cuts are not met by substituting one form of plastic for another, such as bio-plastics and plastics containing recycled content. ●





## We warn of surge of Vietnamese crime gangs driving illegal wildlife trade

In recent years, Vietnam has swiftly emerged as one of the world's leading hotspots for illegal wildlife trade.

The country has been implicated in hundreds of seizures of wildlife contraband such as elephant ivory, tiger skins and bones, rhino horn and pangolins.

But as it prepared to take over as president of the UN Security Council for January and also the presidency of the Association of South-East Asian Nations

(ASEAN) for 2020, we urged it to use the opportunity to clean house.

Our report *Running Out of Time*, published ahead of a major CITES meeting, had warned that despite the rapid explosion of Vietnamese criminal networks driving illegal wildlife trade around the world, the Government's response had been hopelessly inadequate.

Above: EIA undercover ivory viewing in Vietnam



## Huge pangolin scale seizure confirms Nigeria as major trade hub

Customs officers in Nigeria seized a staggering 9.5-tonne shipment of poached pangolin scales in February – equating to approximately 9,500 dead pangolins.

Pangolins have become the world's most trafficked mammal, they are poached and illegally traded in Africa and Asia to supply commercial markets.

Chris Hamley, Senior Pangolin Campaigner, said: "Nigeria has become one of the primary

exit points for the trafficking of pangolin scales. In recent years, very little progress has been made in Nigeria to address its critical role, so this enforcement action is doubly welcome." ●

Right: the haul of pangolin scales seized in Lagos, Nigeria







Shruti Suresh, Senior Wildlife Campaigner, said: "Its leadership role in ASEAN is particularly significant because wildlife trafficking is enabled by porous borders between Vietnam and fellow ASEAN member states Laos and Cambodia.

"In fairness to Vietnam, it hasn't been sitting idle and doing nothing to address such serious crimes, but the response so far has been both inadequate and disproportionate to the massive and widespread scale of wildlife trafficking implicating the country.

"In fact, the situation is worsening with the proliferation of Vietnamese-led wildlife trafficking networks in Africa."

Although Vietnam Customs has

publicised large-scale seizures of ivory and pangolins, seizures without any meaningful follow-up action have little effect on the operations of Vietnamese wildlife trafficking networks who see seizures are a mere business 'loss' easily recouped with the next shipment.

Making matters worse, there have been no convictions of those implicated in any of the large-scale seizures made by Vietnam Customs at ports of entry.

And, of course, actual seizures are only the tip of the iceberg – large quantities of illegal wildlife products enter or leave Vietnam undetected, while products such as powdered rhino horn and tiger bone glue are also consumed within the country. ●

Below: Report cover for 'Running out of Time'



## WILDLIFE NEWS IN BRIEF

- It was back to London's Royal Courts of Justice in February as a group of antiques dealers again sought to overturn the UK Ivory Act. At the time of going to press, we were still awaiting an outcome.
- The work of our Tiger Campaign was showcased in March when BBC Two screened the *Tigers: Hunting the Traffickers*, interviewing our own tiger expert Debbie Banks.

## Climate Week highlights our work on an existential threat to the future of humanity

In September, we threw ourselves wholesale into a special Climate Week, kicking off with a strong EIA presence at the Global Climate Strike in London.

Above: Climate Strikes activated huge crowds around the world

As well as talking about our work to some of the thousands gathered, we were able to interview the youthful protestors as to what the accelerating climate crisis meant to them.

In the following days, our website and social media platforms were given over to taking a closer look at the work done by our dedicated Climate campaigners, their successes and the real-world changes they make.

The series of specially written reports released each day also sought to give the broader context and ramifications of the biggest issue facing the planet in human history.

Our Climate team does far more than investigate the trafficking of climate-harming gases and pressing for meaningful change in the refrigerant sector because what it works on is an issue intimately connected

with everything else that we do, from our Forests and Ocean campaigns to our Wildlife work.

As well as getting involved in the climate strike – as did our colleagues across the Atlantic at EIA US – we were also able to give a swift analysis of the shortcomings of global leaders at the UN Climate Summit in New York on 23 September

We also shared an impassioned letter from the Earth to the human race by young supporter Naryani Costa Jafrate, a look at the challenges of keeping warm in a cooling world, news of a major new report warning of the impact of climate change on our oceans and a special report from Kiev, where Climate Campaign Leader Clare Perry was participating in an international meeting on the threat posed by a growing criminal trade in climate-wrecking refrigerant gases. ●

# Rising emissions ‘a climate crime of epic proportions’

In January, a scientific paper revealed an unexpected and alarming increase in the emissions of HFC-23 – one of the world’s most damaging greenhouse gases.

Widely used in refrigeration and air-conditioning, HFC-23 is 12,400 times more potent than carbon dioxide at heating the planet but emissions have continued to increase despite expectations that industries would incinerate the gas, largely produced as a by-product, bringing emissions to zero, as a result of commitments to phase it out under the Montreal Protocol.

“We have 50 coal-fired plants’ worth of greenhouse gas emissions a year from HFC-23 venting where there should be none,” said Clare Perry, our Climate Campaigns Leader. “This is despite the fact these emissions can be cost-effectively prevented and all major producing countries have undertaken to do this.”

Although the report’s authors did not identify the sources of the emissions they have recorded, China and India are considered the most likely culprits.

“It’s a climate crime of epic proportions,” added Clare. ●

Above right: An HFC-23 manufacturing plant in China



## CLIMATE NEWS IN BRIEF

- Keeping cool in a warming world became a little easier when we relaunched our updated Cool Technologies sustainable cooling database in November.
- After our investigators tracked down a huge, inexplicable spike in the emissions of banned CFC gas to China, a scientific report in December indicated those rogue emissions could significantly delay recovery of the Earth’s ozone layer.



A detailed microscopic image of coronavirus particles, showing their characteristic crown-like structure with spike proteins. The particles are rendered in shades of grey and white against a dark background, creating a textured, almost crystalline appearance.

# If the global coronavirus pandemic teaches us anything, it must be that we need to radically mend our relationship with the natural world

With a third of the global population on coronavirus lockdown by April, the way the world used to be seems an almost surreal, impossibly far-off time.

But the scientific consensus is increasingly pointing at the way the world used to be as the main reason we find ourselves in this appalling crisis – specifically, our global society's increasingly reckless, exploitative and destructive relationship with wildlife.

It was only on 31 December 2019 that the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China reported a cluster of pneumonia cases of

unknown origin, with a common reported link to Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, a fish and live animal market selling different species.

But as the coronavirus (labelled COVID-19) pandemic has increasingly been tracked back to a virus making the jump from wildlife to humans, EIA's expert campaigners have sought to contribute valuable information to the global public debate and to make the case that we need to come out of the other side of this pivotal moment in contemporary human history with the collective will to drastically change our relationship with the natural world.



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## Wildlife traffickers exploit the crisis

As early as February, our campaigners revealed that illegal wildlife traders were cashing in on the outbreak by peddling fake cures containing rhino horn and other endangered species products.

Using online accounts to advertise to potential buyers, traffickers in China and Laos were posting images of a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) product called Angong Niuhuang Wan.

The version offered is understood to be produced in North Korea and, unlike the Chinese version, explicitly states that it contains rhino horn and musk.

Angong Niuhuang Wan is sold in the form of medicine 'balls' made up of a combination of mineral, herbal and animal ingredients and is used to reduce fever.

**Top: Rhino horn for sale in China**

One of the sellers was based in China and has a long history of offering tiger, elephant, helmeted hornbill, rhino and other illegal wildlife for sale online.

Another was a Chinese-owned company with multiple retail outlets in the Laotian capital Vientiane selling tiger, elephant, bear, rhino and other wildlife parts and derivatives.

EIA has previously reported both to relevant authorities but the fact that they continue to offer illegal wildlife products unhindered clearly shows the need for genuine efforts to tackle illegal wildlife trade.

Clouding the issue further is the fact that China – which replaced rhino horn with buffalo horn in Angong Niuhuang Wan since at least 1990 – had issued a document on 22 January naming it among a list of recommended treatments for coronavirus.



## Chinese Government's unbelievable bear bile solution

Even as the world's scientific consensus was by late March pointing to China's wildlife trade as the most likely cause of the coronavirus outbreak, either directly from bats or via an intermediary host such as pangolins, we found the Government actively endorsing a treatment containing bile extracted from live bears.

Bile is a digestive fluid produced by the liver and stored in the gallbladder. It is taken from captive bears using several techniques, all requiring invasive surgery.

Our investigators learnt that the country's National Health Commission was promoting injections of a TCM treatment containing bear bile in a published list.

"Tan Re Qing" injections were among the recommended treatments for 'severe' and

'critical' cases of coronavirus in the COVID-19 Diagnosis and Treatment Plan (7th Trial Version), published on 4 March and circulated via State media. Bear bile is one of the ingredients of "Tan Re Qing".

Even though China banned the consumption of most terrestrial wild animals as food in February, the ban did not cover use of wildlife products in TCM nor as ornamental items.

Aron White, our Wildlife Campaigner and China Specialist, warned: "Aside from the irony of promoting a wildlife product for treatment of a disease which the scientific community has overwhelmingly concluded originated in wildlife, the continued promotion of the use of threatened wildlife in medicine is hugely irresponsible in an era of unprecedented biodiversity loss, including illegal and unsustainable trade."



## Products from endangered tigers sold to promote health

In early April, as the full extent of the threat posed by the pandemic became clear, we exposed criminal wildlife traders continuing to cash in on the crisis – including advertising tiger bone “glue” to maintain health during the pandemic.

Our Wildlife investigators found one Vietnamese trader recommending the use of tiger products as a way to maintain general health during the pandemic.

He was offering his homemade tiger bone “glue” – a substance made from boiling down tiger bones – via his social media account, complete with images and grisly video footage of a tiger being butchered.

**This page:** Online trader photos promoting tiger bone glue

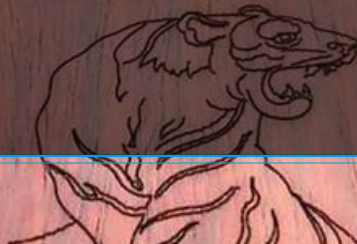
**Opposite page:** Captive bear in China

Debbie Banks, our Tiger and Wildlife Crime Campaign Leader, said: “He’s one of potentially more than 100 tiger keepers and butchers in Vietnam who raise cubs trafficked from captive breeding facilities in Thailand and Laos.

“They keep them until they are mature and fattened up and then slaughter them to order for buyers from Vietnam and China.”

According to traders in Vietnam, there are hundreds of tigers kept in illegal backyard and basement facilities. .

Cao Hồ Cốt





## The virus as a smokescreen

And it wasn't just wildlife suffering as a result of human folly and greed under the pandemic – our Forests Campaign in late March called out Indonesia for planning to seriously weaken legal timber rules and using the pandemic as an excuse.

Indonesia's Voluntary Partnership Agreement with the EU is meant to keep illegal timber out of its international trade through a rigorous legality verification system.

But a Government directive seeks to scrap the binding deal in the name of alleviating the impact of coronavirus on the country's economy.

"Deregulating the protection of Indonesia's forests for short economic gain will have a very negative impact on its reputation as well as on forests and the livelihoods of people who rely on them," warned Faith Doherty, our Forests Campaign Leader.

**This page:** Stockpile of illegal timber in West Papua

**Opposite page:** Indonesia's forests are increasingly under threat





## Palm oil watchdog's sustainability guarantee again exposed as a destructive con

Palm oil has become a hot-button issue for many consumers around the world due to its links with deforestation and the destruction of orangutan habitat.

To reassure these legions of shoppers that they can purchase with a clear conscience, sustainability guarantees have become increasingly commonplace.

The best-known of these is The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), a voluntary certification watchdog created in 2004. Its label is supposed to guarantee that the palm oil is not connected to the destruction of rainforests and human rights abuses.

But for the second time when we've scrutinised the RSPO guarantee, we've found that shoppers are still being conned about the sustainability of the palm oil in the products they buy, from cosmetics and foodstuffs to biofuels.

In November, our report *Who Watches the Watchmen? 2* revealed that the RSPO is still effectively giving false environmental credibility to its products, commonly known as 'greenwashing'.

This was despite these same concerns about the credibility of the RSPO being raised by us in our 2015 report *Who Watches the Watchmen?*

Our latest investigations established a catalogue of shortcomings, including fraudulent auditing of oil palm plantations, primary forests being felled and community land rights violated.

Forests Campaigner Siobhan Pearce said: "If the RSPO is not upholding any of its own rules and if its palm oil isn't what it says it is on the tin, then that's a major problem for the industry.

Above: Aerial view of REA Perdana Estate - East Kalimantan

"You have to wonder whether the RSPO has any credibility at all."

The RSPO lost no time in hitting back, dismissing the latest report and claiming it contained "glaring inaccuracies".

But we made a robust defence of our findings and in an interview with the media its Chief Executive, Officer

Darrel Webber, admitted: "It would be irresponsible for us not to tackle these issues."

He continued: "The EIA thinks we have a blind spot and we are going to check it out. The EIA has been quite constructive. It has given some advice on how to go forward and which we will consider." ●

## China is to finally outlaw illegal timber

For two decades, our Forests Campaign has been urging China to ban the trade of illegal timber – and now it's happening!

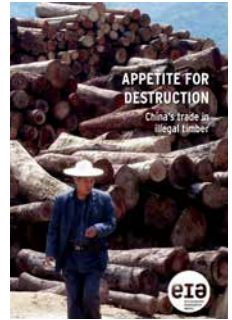
In an extraordinary move in January, the Government said it will be changing its laws to include a ban on buying, processing or transporting stolen timber.

"This is potentially huge, a real game-changer for the future of the planet's precious forests and the battle against dangerous climate change," said Faith Doherty, Forests Campaigns Leader.

"For almost 20 years, China's demand for raw materials has been a massive driver of illegal logging."

China is the world's largest importer of wood and the largest exporter of wood-based products too, but between 15-30 per cent of all timber traded globally has been illegally harvested.

In 2012, our landmark report *Appetite for Destruction* revealed China as the single largest buyer of illegal wood. ●



### FORESTS NEWS IN BRIEF

- In April, we warned that Indonesia, having sought to weaken timber export rules to spur economic growth, was also poised to dilute the sustainability of its palm oil industry.
- In January, our Forests campaigners and partner Kaoem Telapak contributed to a victory for Indonesia over Australia at the World Trade Organisation in a case about paper, making it more difficult to attack Indonesia's log export ban.

Upper right: front cover of our 'Appetite for Destruction' report

## Corrupt timber boss jailed for five years and hit with hefty fine

A high court in Indonesia has upheld the conviction, jail term and substantial fine for a major corrupt timber trader.

Above: illegally logged merbau, West Papua

Our Forests Campaign welcomed the relatively severe punishment as the first of its kind in the country's timber sector, where company bosses routinely escape legal sanction for breaking the law.

We and our Indonesian partner Kaoem Telapak hailed the judgement as a significant blow against illegal logging in the region.

Ming Ho, the director and owner

of Alco Timber Irian and Sorong Timber Iriana, was originally found guilty and sentenced in October last year.

His jail term and fine were confirmed in January at the end of an appeal heard at the Jayapura High Court.

EIA first exposed the activities of Ming Ho during investigations into the illegal logging and trafficking

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## Teak importers must be able to trace legality back to the stump

In February, a Dutch court highlighted the importance of the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) when it ruled that importers of teak from Myanmar must be able to trace the legality of the luxury timber all the way back to its original felling.

The judgement confirms that the EUTR imposes stringent standards on timber traders themselves to ensure their imports are legally harvested at all stages of production.

Our Forests Campaign has submitted a series of complaints against various companies over their imports of Myanmar teak and this latest case arose as a result of three such complaints.



of precious merbau wood from Indonesia in 2012.

Forests Campaigner Thomas Chung said: "EIA and Kaoem Telapak have been investigating and exposing merbau theft and illegal trade for the past two decades, publishing reports such as Rogue Traders, which named two of the kingpins in Indonesia.

"This work led directly to the criminal case against corrupt Indonesian policeman Labora Sitorus back in 2012-13, in which Ming Ho had previously been named as a major player."

Abu Meridian, of Kaoem Telapak, added: "We welcome the ruling against a major player in the criminal exploitation and destruction of the Indonesian forest and commend the

actions taken by the Indonesian authorities."

The case against Ming Ho arose from the 2019 seizure of 384 containers (6,489.28m<sup>3</sup>) of illegal merbau wood, 81 of which were ascribed to Alco Timber Irian and Sorong Timber Iriana, both companies he ran as part of the Alco timber group.

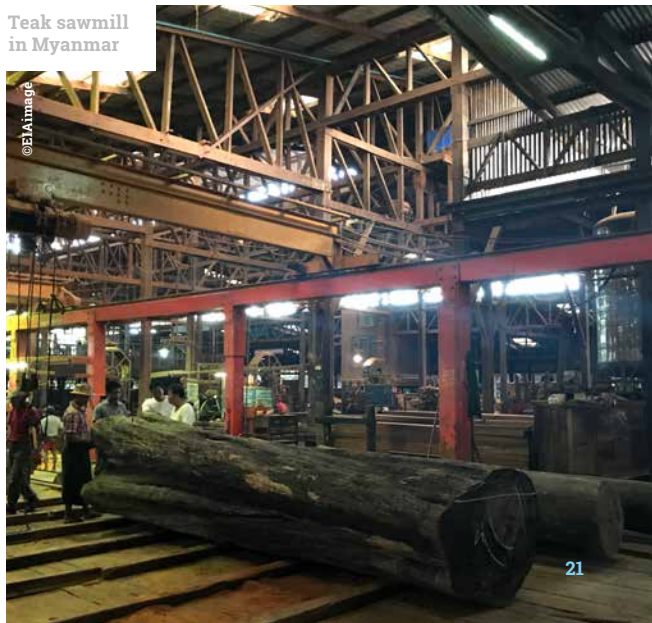
In the judgement handed down by the district court in Sorong on 23 October last year, Ming Ho was found guilty, sentenced to five years in prison and fined 2.5 billion IDR (approx. \$183,171).

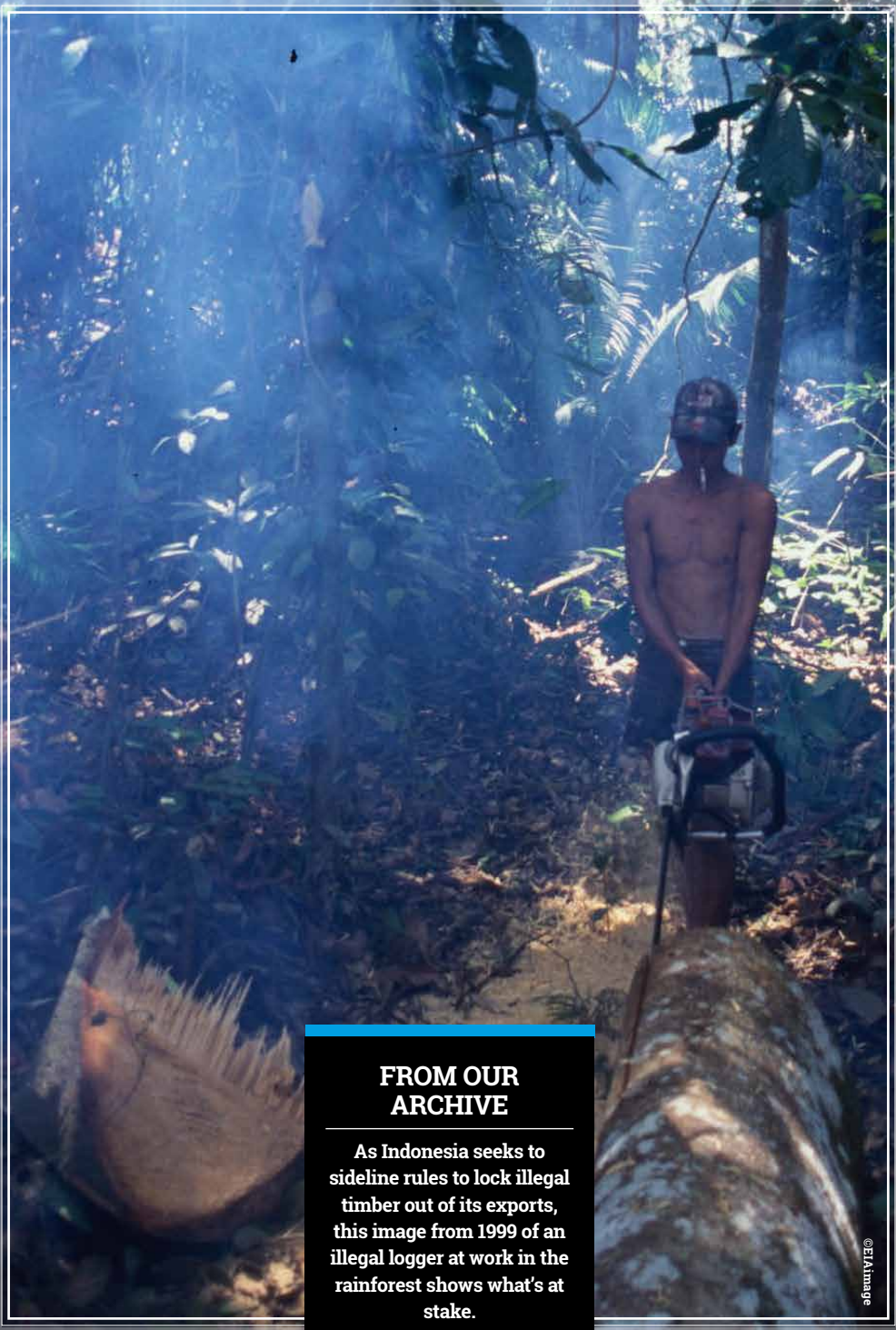
Chung added: "The successful enforcement actions and resulting prosecution highlight the vital importance of continued vigilance and good governance in the timber trade sector." ●

Forests Campaigns Leader Faith Doherty said: "We have been at the forefront of efforts to ensure illegally felled teak from Myanmar is kept out of European markets and are delighted that this ruling underlines the responsibilities of traders to ensure they are not dealing in stolen wood.

"In addition we support any real reforms in Myanmar, reforms the sector desperately needs in order to sustain Myanmar's forests and the people who rely upon them." ●

Teak sawmill in Myanmar





## FROM OUR ARCHIVE

As Indonesia seeks to sideline rules to lock illegal timber out of its exports, this image from 1999 of an illegal logger at work in the rainforest shows what's at stake.





**ENVIRONMENTAL  
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Protecting the environment  
with intelligence



**“If it wasn’t for EIA  
the world would be  
a darker place”.**

**Mary, EIA supporter.**

For a future where humanity respects, protects and  
celebrates the natural world for the benefit of all.

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