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# WWF briefing for Westminster Hall debate on deforestation in the Amazon

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## SUMMARY

- Protecting the Amazon, the world's largest rainforest, is critical to fighting climate change, protecting global biodiversity, and helping the millions of people live in and rely on the Amazon.
- There will be a Westminster Hall debate on "Deforestation in the Amazon" at 2.30pm on Wednesday 23 June 2021. WWF are very pleased that MPs will get a chance to debate this critically important topic, during a period of major weakening of protections of the Amazon by the Bolsonaro government in Brazil and ahead of what is expected to be another record-breaking Amazon fire season.
- **MPs should use the debate to raise the need to strengthen the due diligence provisions of the Environment Bill, currently going through Parliament, and to call for the Government to introduce a global footprint target in the Bill to reduce the impact of the UK's consumption and production abroad in regions like the Amazon.**
- This briefing also provides key facts and statistics about Amazon deforestation and the importance of the Amazon for global biodiversity, our climate, and the people who live in the region.

## STRENGTHENING THE ENVIRONMENT BILL TO REDUCE AMAZON DEFORESTATION

- The Environment Bill, currently at Committee Stage in the Lords, is a welcome opportunity for the UK to show global leadership in protecting the Amazon.
- However, while the inclusion of a due diligence obligation in the Bill is welcome, WWF is concerned that the due diligence elements of the Bill as they stand do not go far enough to protect the Amazon and other critical natural ecosystems or to meet the UK's goals on climate and nature.



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- The Environment Bill currently includes proposals to require firms to conduct due diligence to determine whether they use commodities from areas that have been illegally deforested. These due diligence provisions as they exist are welcome, but by only addressing illegal deforestation, the Government's due diligence proposals do not go far enough to remove deforestation from UK supply chains and do not take account of countries legalising illegal deforestation, as Bolsonaro's government in Brazil is doing right now (see below).
- Forthcoming research by WWF shows that there is up to 2.1 million hectares of natural vegetation that could be legally deforested within the 133 Brazilian municipalities which directly supply the UK with soy. This vegetation covers an area the size of Wales and stores over one billion tonnes of carbon. The most likely scenarios suggest that 71-79% of this could be legally converted, and 22-29% illegally converted. This shows the importance of going further than just addressing illegal deforestation.
- Research also indicates that Brazil and other producer countries lack sufficient mechanisms to identify what is legally and illegally produced. This means it would be challenging for business to show compliance with the legislation, in fact it would be easier and less costly for business to demonstrate that their supply chains are deforestation and conversion free, for example using satellite imagery.
- WWF is calling for the Bill to include a target to significantly reduce the UK's global footprint by 2030. A legal requirement to significantly reduce our global footprint of consumption and production is a critical way for the UK to take full account of the UK's environmental footprint and stop funding deforestation overseas.
- If we get the Environment Bill right the UK could be the first country in the world to embed the ambitions of the [Leaders' Pledge for Nature](#) in legislation, aligning our domestic and international ambition ahead of the CBD and COP26 and leaving a lasting legacy for nature.
- Reducing the UK's global environmental footprint and ensuring we don't offshore our impact is also a key element of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.
- WWF supports the Greener UK coalition of NGOs' [briefing on this issue](#) for the Lords Second Reading debate on the Environment Bill.

## THE BOLSONARO GOVERNMENT'S WEAKENING OF FOREST PROTECTIONS

- The Brazilian government under President Jair Bolsonaro is actively working right now to undermine protections for the Amazon.
- This has implications for UK legislation as it means they are effectively legalising currently illegal practices, which would make the UK government's due diligence legislation less effective.
- Our WWF Brazil partners produced [a briefing](#) in April which gives a comprehensive overview of how the Brazilian government are pushing a package of laws to make deforestation easier in the Amazon.
- Bill 2633 in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, which encourages and legalizes land-grabbing of public lands, is one of the key parts of the legislative agenda. Bill 510- the Brazilian Senate bill that also encourages land-grabbing- can also be put on the



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agenda at any time. At the beginning of May, a group of 40 British companies, including Sainsbury's, Aldi, the Co-Op, and the retail association BRC sent the Brazilian Congress a letter asking for the rejection of the proposal pending in the Senate.

- Bill 490 in the Brazilian National Congress would authorize damaging activities in indigenous land including mining and road construction. In June 2021 there have been [extensive protests](#) by indigenous groups against the planned legislation. There have been [numerous examples](#) of incursion into indigenous land by illegal gold miners during Bolsonaro's term.
- The Brazilian Chamber of Deputies approved, on 9 June, an urgent request for a Bill that could lead to a change in the National System of Protected Areas, which could pave the way for the construction of roads in protected areas.
- This is an urgent problem: the Brazilian Government wants to make major progress on these proposals before the National Congress goes into recess on 18 July.

## KEY FACTS AND STATISTICS ON AMAZON DEFORESTATION

- The main causes of deforestation in the Amazon are agriculture, cattle ranching, road and hydropower infrastructure, extractives and logging. These are all problems which are affected by consumption and production in the UK- hence WWF's call for a global footprint target in the Environment Bill.
- Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon was at a historic low of 4,571 sq km in 2012 but was over 11,000 sq km in 2020. Across the whole of Brazil, deforestation increased by over 13% in 2020.
- Between 1992-2014, 645,738 sq km of Brazilian Amazon was either degraded or deforested - that's an area more than 2.5 times the size of the UK.
- If current deforestation and degradation rates continue, 40% of the Amazon rainforest will be lost by 2050.
- WWF's 2021 Deforestation Fronts report showed that there are 24 deforestation hotspots around the world where large areas of remaining forests are under threat - five of these are in the Amazon.
- In June 2020, the number of fires in the Brazilian Amazon hit a 13-year high, with over 6,800 fires detected. The fire season this year is likely to be similarly destructive.
- Demand for soy is a particular cause of deforestation. The land required to meet the UK's annual demand for soy between 2016 and 2018 was on average 17,000 sq km, or an area nearly the size of Wales. 65% of the UK's soy land footprint is in Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, where soy production has a high risk of causing deforestation including in the Amazon region. In 2019, only 27% of the soy consumed in the UK was certified as deforestation and conversion-free.

## BACKGROUND FACTS ON THE AMAZON

### The Amazon and biodiversity

- The Amazon rainforest is one of the world's most important biodiversity hotspots.
- The Amazon region contains over a third of the world's remaining tropical rainforest.



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- The Amazon is thought to be home to 10% of known species on Earth, including 16,000 species of tree, 3,000 species of fish, and more species of primate than anywhere else on Earth.
- New species are being discovered all the time- between 1999 and 2015, 2,200 new species of animal and plant were discovered in the Amazon. The new species discovered since 1999 include a river dolphin, eight species of monkey (including one that purrs like a cat), two species of porcupine and a vegetarian piranha.

### **The Amazon and climate change**

- Protecting the Amazon is critical to reaching the 1.5C climate target established at the Paris Agreement.
- An estimated 76 billion tonnes of carbon is stored in the Amazon rainforest.
- More than half of the Amazon's carbon is stored in indigenous territories and protected areas- showing the critical importance for our climate of better protection for these areas.
- 20 billion tonnes of water are released into the atmosphere per day by all the trees in the Amazon - playing a crucial role in regulating our global climate.
- Some scientists estimate that if we lose just 5% more of the Amazon, it will trigger a tipping point where the rainforest will no longer be able to sustain itself - we will lose the Amazon as we know it.
- From 2012-2016, there was a 200% increase in carbon loss across the Amazon compared to the decade earlier.

### **People living in the Amazon**

- 34 million people live in the Amazon, including almost 3 million indigenous people.
- The Amazon has more indigenous peoples' groups than anywhere else in the world, and around 100 live in voluntary isolation.
- Around half of the Amazon is covered by protected areas and indigenous territories.

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