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WWF briefing for Westminster Hall debate on deforestation in the Amazon

JANUARY 2022

This briefing is an updated version of [the briefing](#) WWF produced for a [Westminster Hall debate](#) held on the same topic in June 2021.

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 11.30am on Wednesday 5 January 2022. Following the Westminster Hall debate on the same topic in June 2021, this is another opportunity for MPs to debate this critical issue, and comes ahead of expected votes on legislation in Brazil in early 2022.
- **MPs should use the debate to raise the need for strong Government action in the secondary legislation on the deforestation provisions of the Environment Act, currently subject to [consultation](#).**
- 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.
- This briefing supplements [the briefing](#) produced by our colleagues in WWF Brazil which details current threats to the Brazilian Amazon as a result of policies supported by the administration of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.

STRENGTHENING THE ENVIRONMENT ACT SECONDARY LEGISLATION

- The Environment Act became law in November 2021. We welcome the Environment Act as the first major piece of environmental legislation in 30 years, and for including an obligation on firms to conduct due diligence to determine whether they use commodities from areas that have been illegally deforested.
- However, we are concerned that by only addressing illegal deforestation, the Government's due diligence proposals do not go far enough to remove deforestation



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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).

- **If it does not take action to extend the due diligence requirement, the Government must ensure that a broad range of commodities fall in scope of the requirement.** That means not just soy and palm oil, but also commodities like timber, pulp, beef, leather, coffee and cocoa. Production of all of these also drives deforestation in forests like the Amazon.
- During the Act's passage through Parliament, WWF also called for it 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.
- The Government's [consultation](#) on the due diligence provision is an opportunity to address concerns regarding proposals as currently planned.

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.
- WWF is particularly concerned about the current package of legislation expected to be considered by the Brazilian National Congress in early 2022. Of particular concern are the land-grabbing bill PL2633/PL510 and the environmental licensing bill PL3729/04.
- **The package of legislation in Brazil has implications for UK legislation as it means that Brazil is effectively legalising currently illegal practices, which would make the UK government's due diligence legislation less effective.**
- Our partners in WWF Brazil have produced a detailed [briefing note](#) which explains how the Brazilian legislation will increase deforestation in the Amazon.
- In summary, the package of Brazilian legislation would:
 - Legalise "land-grabbing" in publicly-owned forests.
 - Weaken mechanisms to prevent fraud in land titling.
 - Weaken regulatory control over deforestation induced by the construction or improvement of roads across well-preserved forest.
 - Allow high-impact projects to be installed without environmental assessment.
 - Allow automatic licensing of most projects, including mining and road improvements.

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.



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- Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon is at its highest level in 10 years. Research published in August by the Brazilian research institute Imazon showed that between August 2020 and July 2021, the Brazilian Amazon rainforest lost 10,476 sq km. This is an area nearly seven times bigger than greater London. It compares to 4,571 sq km lost in 2012, and is 57% higher than equivalent figures for 2019-20.
- Between 1992 and 2014, 645,738 sq km of Brazilian Amazon was either degraded or deforested - an area more than 2.5 times the size of the UK.
- If current deforestation and degradation rates continue, around 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.
- Demand for soy (used for example in animal feed) 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.
- 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 and re-iterated at the COP26 conference in November 2021.
- 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.



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- 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.
- Recent research by the Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project has shown that the Brazilian Amazon specifically is now a net carbon emitter due to deforestation and fires, while other parts of the Amazon are still a net carbon sink. This shows the urgent importance of halting and reversing deforestation in Brazil.

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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Date	17 December 2021