

International Agreement on Tropical Timber Adopted

The United Nations Conference on Tropical Timber, which held two sessions in 1983 under UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) auspices, successfully concluded its work on 18 November by adopting the International Tropical Timber Agreement 1983. The objectives of the Agreement are to provide an effective framework for cooperation and consultation between tropical timber-producing and -consuming countries with a view to promoting the expansion and diversification of international trade in tropical timber and improving structural conditions in the tropical timber market.

To these ends the Agreement seeks to promote research and development aimed at improving forest management and wood utilization; to improve market intelligence; to encourage increased and further processing of tropical timber in producing member countries; to encourage reforestation and forest management activities; to improve marketing and distribution of tropical timber exports of producing members; and to encourage national policies aimed at sustainable utilization and conservation of tropical forests together with their genetic resources while always maintaining the ecological balance in the regions concerned. It is envisaged that projects in these areas will be financed from the Second Account of the Common Fund for Commodities when it becomes operational, from regional and international financial institutions, and from voluntary contributions.

For the purposes of the Agreement 'tropical timber' is defined as non-coniferous tropical wood for industrial uses, which grows or is produced in the countries situated between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. The term covers logs, sawnwood, veneer sheets, and plywood. Following the adoption of the Agreement, the Chairman, Tatsuro Kunugi (Japan), said that the Asian producing members had indicated their intention to pursue the question of a wider definition of tropical timber products with the International Tropical Timber Council, which will be the highest authority of the

International Tropical Timber Organization that is to be established under the Agreement.

In the Council, half of the votes will be held by producing countries and half by consuming countries. Within each of these groups, votes will be distributed among individual countries according to certain formulae related to their interest in tropical timber. Projects for financing or sponsorship will be approved by the Council by special vote, which means a vote requiring at least two-thirds of the votes cast by producing members present and voting, and at least 60% of the votes of consumer members present and voting, counted separately, on condition that these votes are cast by at least half of the producing member countries and at least half of the consuming member countries present and voting.

Following the adoption of the Agreement, the representative of the United States, Clinton Shaw, said that his delegation was reserving its position on the provisions concerning the distribution of votes and the definition of the special vote. One of the first tasks of the Council will be to decide on the location of the headquarters of the Organization. The countries which have so far offered to provide sites are Belgium, France, Greece, Indonesia, Japan, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

The Agreement is being held open for signature at United Nations Headquarters, New York, from 2 January 1984. It will enter into force definitively on 1 October 1984, or on any date thereafter, provided that not fewer than 12 governments of producing countries holding at least 55% of the total votes and 16 governments of consuming countries holding at least 70% of the total votes, have signed the Agreement definitively or have ratified it.

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ICSU/SCOPE Review of Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War

The International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU), through its Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE), has under way a careful survey of the state of scientific knowledge concerning the expectable environmental consequences of possible nuclear war. The aim is to develop, among the world scientific community, a consensus on this most horrendous matter, and to make the findings available to fellow-scientists, to policy-makers, and to representatives of concerned citizen groups as well as Governments throughout the world.

The effort was authorized by the ICSU General Assembly in 1982, on the basis of a recommendation from the Fifth General Assembly of SCOPE, which had been held in June of that year in Ottawa, Canada.* It is examining the full range of possible effects of nuclear war, including: production of dust, soot, and smoke; attenuation of ultraviolet radiation and stratospheric ozone; changes in weather patterns; electromagnetic pulses; direct and delayed radioactive fallout; and the

consequences of such changes for water, soil, plants, humans, and other animals.

The Review is enlisting the collaboration of leading scientists from more than 12 countries, and is drawing upon the information supplied in papers and conferences such as the Conference on the World After Nuclear War, which was held in Washington, DC, during 31 October–1 November 1983.† A session to plan the ICSU/SCOPE Review was hosted by the Swedish Royal Academy of sciences in October 1983. The plans were carried further with special regard to agricultural effects at New Delhi in February 1984. Under the chairmanship of Sir Frederick Warner, of the United Kingdom, the Review has a Steering Committee with other members from France, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the USA, and the USSR, and including a representative from ICSU's Executive Board.

It is expected that a workshop on atmospheric aspects will be held in Leningrad fairly early in 1984, and that another,

* Described in our Autumn issue of that year (*Environmental Conservation*, 9(3), pp. 263–4, 1982).—Ed.

† See, *inter alia*, the account by Dr Norman Myers published on pp. 79–80 of our latest issue.—Ed.

centring on radiation effects, will be held in Paris in October 1984. The project has an office at the Department of Chemistry, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ, England, UK, where a writing session is planned for early in the summer of 1985.

The Steering Committee is aiming for a final report to be issued during the summer of 1985, and does not expect to release any of its findings until then. The matter is of such importance, and speculation about the range and magnitude of

effects is unfolding so rapidly, that prudence suggests no publication until the full appraisal has been completed.

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'Bombing' Forest Fires: A Proposed Technology

A West German engineer has developed the concept of a 'bomb' approach to controlling fires that spread through large natural areas. Dipl.-Ing. Malay Modak, of West Berlin, suggests that plexiglass spheres filled with compressed carbon dioxide and nitrogen, when dropped into burning areas, can serve as effective fire-extinguishers by releasing fire-smothering gases.

Modak's proposal is of scientific interest from the viewpoint of increasing efficiency of aerial fire-extinguishing efforts. Spreading water from airplanes, the traditional approach, requires heavy loading of fire-fighting aircraft from sources which must be relatively close to fires. Dropped water often misses its target or is rapidly dissipated by the heat of the flames that it aims to douse; and the closer a fire-fighting aircraft comes to a fire, the more dangerous the mission becomes. The idea of solid containers of extinguishant which could be dropped directly into a fire, with high probability that it would not be released until reaching the hottest part of the flames, is thus of appeal. In Modak's approach, hundreds of plexiglass 'bombs', which would resemble small earth-satellites (complete with protruding rods to prevent the balls from rolling) could simply be loaded into the holds of fire-fighting aircraft and released into pinpointed areas. The 'bombs' would not degrade until reaching the heart of the fire, at which time they would explode, causing layers of carbon dioxide to spread over the flames, as well as nitrogen gas to help promote an inert

atmosphere for retarding or slowing combustion.

The major drawbacks of the bomb approach are *materials* and *money*. What Modak is proposing, essentially, is a system of throwaway fire extinguishers, which are strong enough to contain compressed gases under non-fire conditions. Finding the right materials at the right price would pose a challenge; insufficient materials and poor bomb-design would mean premature explosion of the devices, with costly and potentially disastrous results. At the same time, high-strength bombs would most probably be prohibitively expensive.

It would appear that some laboratory-scale work on fire-extinguishing bombs of the proposed nature might be worth while. They could conceivably prove to be effective components of thermally-activated fire-extinguishing systems and even have other far-reaching applications. Modak proposes, for example, that his bombs could be used for extinguishing oil-slick fires on water, for home and building fire-extinguishers, and even for acid rain control. Further information may be obtained from: Dipl.-Ing. Malay Modak, Dankelmannstrasse 35, 1000 Berlin 19, West Germany, Tel. 322 46 06.

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Henderson Island Saved

Some months back (*Environmental Conservation*, 10(2), pp. 171-3, 1983) we called attention to a serious threat to Henderson Island, the last remaining essentially pristine elevated coral atoll in the oceanic Pacific. A wealthy American strip-miner had asked the British Government for permission to build a home, landing facilities, and an airstrip, on this small uninhabited island near Pitcairn, of Bounty mutiny fame. He had offered, as inducement, to build an airstrip on Pitcairn and to give the Pitcairn people \$800,000 'to better their living conditions'. The result of this proposal, if accepted, would have been to destroy both Henderson and Pitcairn as functioning systems, and to sacrifice all future opportunity to study a practically unaltered set of island ecosystems as a baseline for observations on other, changing, islands.

When word of this proposal leaked out, hurried efforts were made to alert such organizations as the Pacific Science Association, the Royal Society of London, the Smithsonian Institution, and various other British and US conservation groups. A

storm of protest resulted, directed to the British Commonwealth Office. Much debate ensued as to the relative values of maintaining intact the one remaining example of an important type of island and of major financial assistance to a small, isolated group of people of great historical and sociological interest. In this connection the question was raised as to whether such outside 'assistance' would not destroy this tiny culture, as such, by breaking down its isolation and absorbing it into the body of Western culture.

The desirability of carrying out an ecological study of Henderson Island, before the threatened change or any alteration took place, was emphasized, and possibilities of funding such an expensive undertaking were discussed, but with little result.

We are now happy to announce that permission to settle on Henderson Island has been denied by the British authorities 'for administrative and environmental reasons'. The threat to the island's integrity has been, at least for now, averted.

Possibilities for at least a limited study of Henderson Island