

Assembly Bill 1979

California Deforestation-Free Procurement Act

Assembly Member Ash Kalra

SUMMARY

Tropical deforestation is responsible for a significant portion of the global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that cause climate change. They also have significant and wide-ranging impacts on biodiversity and human rights. As a large public purchaser, the state of California can use its purchasing power to encourage global supply chains to reduce tropical deforestation and adopt sustainable practices that align with the state’s commitment to fight against climate change.

AB 1979 would require state procurement contracts comprised of forest-risk commodities to certify that their operations and supply chains do not contribute to tropical deforestation. It would also require contractors to have a “forest policy” that outlines the policies and procedures that have been put in place to ensure compliance.

BACKGROUND

Tropical forests cover roughly seven percent of the Earth’s surface, but harbor close to 50 percent of all species on the planet. Each year, millions of acres are lost due to human activity. In 2018 alone, 30 million acres of tropical forests were lost, about one-third the size of California. The main driver of deforestation is industrial-scale production of widely consumed “forest-risk commodities,” including but not limited to palm oil, soy, cattle, rubber, paper/pulp and timber.

In many countries, tropical deforestation is closely associated with violations of the land rights of Indigenous People. It is also closely linked with worker exploitation, forced labor, child labor, violence against land defenders, and illegal wildlife trafficking.

On top of its status as the third leading driver of global CO2 emissions, many animal and plant species have been lost or put on the brink of extinction because of tropical deforestation and forest degradation. Biologists believe if these trends are allowed to continue, there will be a major mass

extinction in tropical forests and the biodiverse ecosystems they support. For example, deforestation has cut orangutan populations by more than half in some tropical areas over the last 15 years.

As an outspoken leader in addressing the climate crisis, California plans to reduce the state’s GHG emissions to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. Additionally, the New York Declaration on Forests, to which California is a signatory, has set a goal to end deforestation by 2030.

Hundreds of consumer brands, commodity traders, and national and subnational governments have already shown their support for ending deforestation with many also committing to zero deforestation in their supply chains. Since 2016, a number of nation-states, notably Norway and France, have also adopted deforestation-free procurement approaches.

SOLUTION

The California Deforestation-Free Procurement Act will complement global efforts to curb deforestation and its consequent contribution to climate change by ensuring that entities contracting with the State of California do not contribute to tropical forest loss through their supply chains.

Specifically, AB 1979 requires state procurement contracts entered or renewed by January 1, 2025, and that include wholly or in part a forest-risk commodity, to certify that the product has not contributed to tropical deforestation. AB 1979 would also require those state contractors dealing with forest-risk commodities to have in place a “forest policy.”

By adopting and implementing “forest policies”, all contractors doing business with the State of California would ensure, at a minimum, that their commodity supply chains meet best practice standards of traceability and transparency, adhere to High Conservation Values, have a progressive reduction of emissions, respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, protect biodiversity, and prevent poaching of at-risk species.

In order to promote best practices, AB 1979 requires the Department of General Services to develop a Deforestation-Free Code of Conduct by July 1, 2023. The Code will include a list of forest-risk commodities and guidance for contractors.

AB 1979 extends California's environmental leadership to the protection of tropical forests and sends a resounding signal to global markets that destructive commodity-driven deforestation and primary forest degradation will not be tolerated.

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