



A CITES priority:

## Ramin and the Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, Bangkok, Thailand 2004

TRAFFIC briefing document  
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At the Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP13), Parties will consider a proposal to list Ramin *Gonystylus* spp. in CITES Appendix II. With growing international concern over illegal logging of Ramin and the legality of the existing trade, it is hoped that the listing would strengthen international trade controls for this valuable Asian timber.

Ramin *Gonystylus* spp. is a tropical hardwood that is mostly used in the manufacture of doors, furniture and smaller items such as picture frames, billiard cues, blinds and baby cribs. Though it is found throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific, from the Nicobar Islands to the Solomon and Fiji Islands, the largest exporters of Ramin are Indonesia and Malaysia. There are about 30 species of *Gonystylus*, with six species being of some commercial importance and *G. bancanus* being the most heavily exploited species.

IUCN classifies 15 species of *Gonystylus* (including *G. bancanus*) as Vulnerable and these 15 Species have been included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species since the year 2000. Populations have declined as a result of habitat loss and degradation, as well as logging – mostly from peat swamp forests. These threats are of special concern for *G. bancanus*, being the most important source of Ramin timber.

### Production and trade

The deteriorating conservation status of Ramin could be inferred by the fact that while more than 1.5 million m<sup>3</sup> of Ramin were logged annually in the 1970s, log production has declined rapidly in recent years, with Malaysia producing 137 512 m<sup>3</sup> and Indonesia producing 131 307 m<sup>3</sup> in 2000. Most Malaysian Ramin is from Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak, while logging of Ramin in Indonesia takes place mainly in the peat swamp forests of Kalimantan and Sumatra.

The largest importers of Ramin sawn timber are countries such as China, Hong Kong, Germany, Italy, Japan, Singapore and Taiwan. These seven countries, for example, accounted for over 90% of all Ramin sawn timber exports from Malaysia in 2001 (see Table 1). The largest buyers of processed Ramin products are countries in the European Union, with Indonesian exports, for example, dominated by direct trade with Italy (see Table 2).



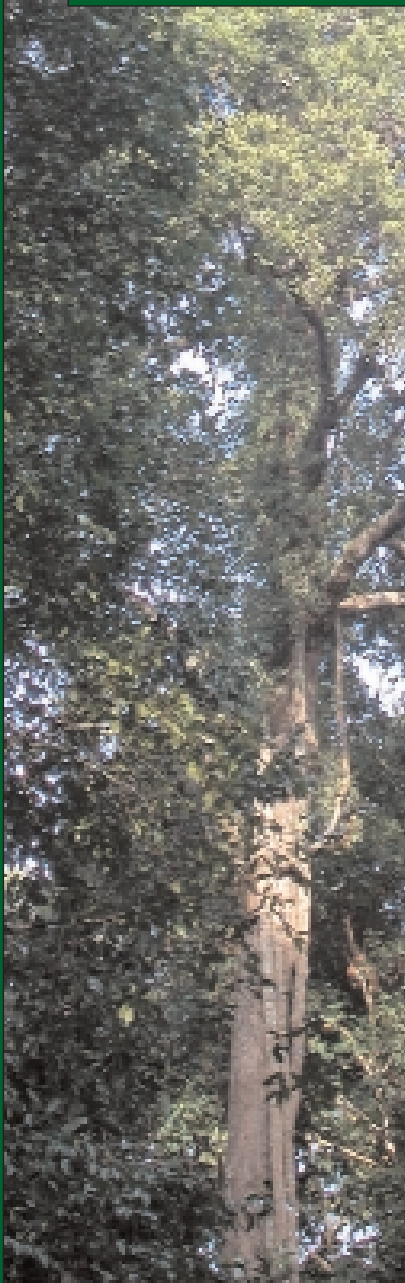
Illegal Ramin,  
Port Kelang,  
Malaysia.

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The particular characteristics of Ramin bark are useful in distinguishing the species from others in peat swamp habitat.

Courtesy of FRIM-UNDP/GEF Peat Swamp Forest Project



**Table 1.**  
Exports of Ramin sawn timber from Malaysia in 2001 (August-December) by country of destination.

Country	Volume (m <sup>3</sup> )
Hong Kong	10 753
Italy	8429
China	6226
Singapore	4832
Japan	3978
Germany	1288
Taiwan	1194
Others	3585
<b>Total</b>	<b>39 285</b>

Source: UNEP-WCMC CITES Trade Database (Comparative Tabulations).

**Table 2.**  
Volume (cubic metres) of Indonesian exports of Ramin to Europe in 2002 (mouldings, dowels, f-jointed timber and doors).

Country	Volume (m <sup>3</sup> )
Italy	1 716
United Kingdom	430
Austria	231
Spain	218
Netherlands	216
Denmark	90
Germany	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 980</b>

Source: CITES Management Authority of Indonesia.

## Illegal logging and trade

Due to the declining areas of virgin peat swamp forests remaining outside of protected areas in Indonesia, there have been frequent reports over the past decade of encroachment into national parks for the purpose of illegal logging of Ramin. Smuggling and 'laundering' of illegally logged Ramin was also alleged to have occurred through Singapore and Malaysia. Subsequent enforcement actions in the two countries have confirmed cases of illegal Ramin trade.

In 2001, following concerns over rampant illegal logging, Indonesia placed Ramin on Appendix III of CITES, with an annotation covering logs, sawn wood, veneer and all finished products. The listing was subsequently imposed with a ban on all Ramin export from Indonesia except that from one concession

in Riau, Sumatra, that had been certified by the *Lembaga Ekolabel Indonesia* (LEI), the local certification scheme, and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). This concession, run by P.T. Diamond Raya, is currently the single source of legal Ramin trade from Indonesia, in volumes of processed products limited under an annual allowable cut.

Malaysia objected to the use of the annotation and placed a reservation on the listing of parts and derivatives, except for logs and sawn timber. Among the reasons for Malaysia's reservation were the possible difficulties in differentiating these Ramin species from several other timber species of similar colour and/or qualities, such as jelutong and rubberwood. However, it should be noted that most traders could easily distinguish these species, with Ramin timber having a market value close to ten times that of rubber wood. Furthermore, jelutong has very a much finer grain texture compared with Ramin, with the two timbers being very easy to distinguish using a simple hand-lens. In general, Customs officials should be able to differentiate Ramin from other species using existing identification guides and simple hand-held lenses to examine the wood structure.

Despite these steps to reduce unsustainable harvest and trade of Ramin, however, illegal activities were still taking place. Seizures were conducted in a number of importing countries, including the US, the UK, Canada, Singapore, Hong Kong and Italy. Some of the biggest seizures made in the US, for example, have been Ramin pool (billiard) cues – about 883 000 pieces of Ramin were confiscated and held in the custody of the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection or the US Marshals Service. In the UK, more than USD234 000 worth of Ramin picture frame mouldings were confiscated in just one seizure in March 2002.

It was evident that illegally logged Ramin was still entering the world market, often via Malaysia and Singapore. While the Appendix III listing had significantly increased the transparency of the trade, and had been beneficial in addressing some of the illegal trade, more measures were needed to improve the effectiveness of trade controls and enhance co-operation and co-ordination in the region and globally with all importing countries.

## Gaps and weaknesses

A study by TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, as well as a series of national and international workshops with the stakeholders from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, identified a number of key recommendations needed to address gaps and weaknesses in legislation and systems for controlling international trade. These critical issues include tracking movements of timber (chain of custody), verification of country of origin, pre-Convention stocks, stockpiles, requirements for species-specific declarations for shipments, look-alikes and other implementation difficulties. These will need to be resolved at national and tri-national levels regardless of the CITES-listed status of the species.

In Indonesia, trade enforcement and harvest monitoring systems need to be improved, as well as registration of existing national Ramin stockpiles and the resolution of problems related to barter trade. Co-ordination between the different governmental departments and agencies also needs to be enhanced, especially among the forestry and trade ministries, in addition to ensuring greater awareness of CITES regulations among all authorities.

Awareness of CITES regulations and greater inter-agency co-ordination were also identified as priorities in Malaysia. There is also a need for increased enforcement checks of illegal landing sites in Peninsular Malaysia, as well as mechanisms to ensure that Malaysia's Free Trade Zones and barter trade centres are not used for 'laundering' Ramin. In addition, mechanisms are needed to determine the appropriate CITES and other documents that can be used for Ramin verified as originating from Malaysia.

For both countries, it is recognised that mechanisms for information exchange among law enforcement agencies is urgently needed and that all the relevant agencies should share information in all existing procedures, legislation, regulations and documentation. To address trade discrepancies that are currently



Ramin can be stained to take on various colours and hues - this example (below) shows three finished variations for use in venetian blinds.



Policing small boats carrying mixed cargoes of hardwood logs, often including Ramin, present the biggest challenge for CITES enforcement agencies in the three countries.



evident between data from CITES Management Authorities and other agencies including Customs, statistics and data capture systems also need to be co-ordinated and improved to enable accurate cross-checking between volumes of production, domestic trade and bilateral trade. Harmonised customs codes for Ramin also need to be developed between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore so that Ramin products can be correctly identified and documented.

A Tri-National Workshop held in April 2004, involving Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, focused on addressing current gaps and weaknesses in controlling Ramin trade, regulatory implementation and law enforcement. Representatives of the three governments at the workshop committed to forming a Tri-National Task Force to increase law enforcement co-operation in combating illegal trade in Ramin and promote effective implementation of CITES. Malaysia is taking the lead in the formation of the Task Force and it is hoped that constructive dialogue, engagement and co-operation between all parties concerned can continue under this important initiative.

## Strengthening international trade controls

Because various *Gonystylus* species are traded using the generic trade name “Ramin”, the Appendix II listing being considered at CoP13 includes all *Gonystylus* species. There is no specific Harmonised System (HS) Customs code for Ramin, which is traded under various tariff categories and, as such, Customs authorities would have difficulty distinguishing different species of Ramin, especially in processed forms. As the majority of products in international trade are semi-finished and finished products rather than logs and sawn wood, the proposal also includes all parts and derivatives.

An Appendix II listing can provide elements that would help strengthen international trade controls for Ramin. For example, it has the criteria that all CITES Parties (and not just the listing State, as with Appendix III) ensure that specimens are legally acquired.

An Appendix II listing of Ramin could provide more avenues for control such as the requirement for non-detriment findings, which, if based on robust methodology, would also enhance the setting of sustainable harvest and trade quotas that are internationally acceptable. The sole approved concessionaire for export of Ramin in Indonesia, is already conducting non-detriment findings as part of the certification process. The national export quota for Ramin is based on these non-detriment findings. Malaysia currently does not conduct non-detriment findings for Ramin, although the country’s advances in sustainable forestry practices as a whole does provide it with an adequate forest management framework for doing so.

Appendix II listings are also more widely understood and implemented by CITES Parties than Appendix III and may therefore provide stricter, wider and more consistent implementation across the board. Ultimately, an Appendix II listing would give governments the controls, processes, tools and information that would assist them in managing their Ramin resources. This can only complement and support ongoing efforts at addressing unsustainable or illegal harvest and trade, including the work of the Tri-National Ramin Task Force – and boost consumer confidence in the legal origin of Ramin products and the overall sustainability of the trade.



**TRAFFIC**,  
the wildlife trade  
monitoring network,  
works to ensure that  
trade in wild plants and  
animals is not a threat to  
the conservation of nature.

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