Burma (Myanmar)

Forests
- 34 Mn ha - tropical forest (75%), temperate forest (25%)
- very high biodiversity and a large number of endemic species

Timber Species:
- Teak, Rosewood (Padauk), Pyinkado (Iron wood), numerous Dipterocarp and Shorea spp, Gurjun (Gurjang & Keruing)
- Burma has about 60% of the world’s natural reserves of teak (non-plantation)
- Biggest exporter of teak, producing 75% of all internationally traded teak

Issues
- The military regime, SLORC, is considered illegal due to having maintained itself in power despite losing the 1990 elections in which Aung San Suu Kyi's party won 80% of the votes. Therefore many observers consider all exports from Burma to be “illegal”.
- The United Nations lists it’s concerns with the Myanmar regime as follows:
  - “extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, enforced disappearances, rape, torture, inhuman treatment, mass arrests, forced labour, including the use of children, forced relocation and denial of freedom of assembly, association, expression and movement”
- There are numerous negative reports about the forestry situation
- 1.4% deforestation per annum (highest in region)
- Recent high volume teak exports have caused deforestation and consequent soil erosion and floods
- The teak export industry is mainly under the control of SLORC or one of the many ethnic minority armies and therefore directly contributes to their finances
- United States law prohibits the importation into the of any article that is a product of Burma (from 27 August 2003).(Note: Timber may enter the US via Thailand)
- Significant volumes of Burmese timber is exported to Thailand (especially teak and rosewood) and then is re-exported as manufactured product. The teak is often sold as “plantation” and the other hardwoods are described as originating in other SE Asian countries.

Significant Companies
- The Myanmar Timber Enterprise (MTE) has theoretically a monopoly on the harvesting, processing and marketing of teak, with the private sector operating only in the non-teak hardwood processing industry. However, the MTE contracts out some of its work to privately run logging companies and timber processing facilities. These lucrative contracts are, more often than not, given to companies that have close contacts with Burma’s military elite. Such national entrepreneurs frequently have concessions throughout the natural resources sector and include, amongst others, Asia World, Shwe Than Lwin, Dagon, Htoo Company, Billion Group, Kayah Phu and the Woodland Group of Companies.
Status of good forest management and certification
- The Burmese Department of Forestry have established a Timber Certification Committee with a view to developing a certification system. Given the political climate, the lack of independent NGOs and other stakeholders, this looks unlikely to be achieved in short/medium term.
- Individual efforts to source timber from Burma using chain of custody controls coupled with reviews of the social and economic impact of the business have been attempted, but does not address the fundamental issue of the legitimacy of the regime.

Other active NGOs
- A large number of domestic and international NGOs are campaigning / focusing on Burma, of which the majority consider trade with Burma to not be justified. Most NGOs believe that trade with Burma to be directly supporting the regime and other armed groups.

Non-WWF reports

Useful websites
- www.burmacampaign.org.uk
- www.wri.org/ffi/burma
- www.globalwitness.org

Conclusion
- There is a significant risk to buy wood products sourced from Burma. These risks include:
  - Third party verification of legality is not likely to be valid as the regime arguably is illegal and that most independent auditing organisations do not operate work in Burma.
  - Revenues from timber exports go to varying degrees directly to the regime and therefore any organisation trading with Burma faces accusation of supporting the regime and association with the long list of human rights issues.
- It is arguable that responsible sourcing of forest products can occur in Burma. For this option to be credible though, the purchasing organisation must prove the benefits of such trade to the Burmese people whilst ensuring that the trade is not directly supporting the regime.
- If key stakeholder support for limited trading cannot be obtained, WWF believes that forest products from Burma should be regarded as “unwanted” with the GFTN stepwise approach to Responsible Purchasing and therefore should be phased out.
- There is also a significant risk that teak products processed in Thailand, China and some other South East Asian countries are from Burmese forests. Chain of custody controls should be implemented to reduce this risk.