

## New shelters built with Aussie 'green' timber

The demand for wood to build shelter in Sri Lanka is placing a huge burden on the island's precious rainforests.

To reduce the impact and extend of environmental damage, Oxfam Australia has exported 8,500 cubic metres of environmentally friendly Australian timber to Sri Lanka as part of its shelter construction program. The Australian plantation pine has come from sustainable renewable sources and has received endorsement from the World Wildlife Fund of Australia.



*The International Organisation for Migration has used Australian timber to build this transitional housing site in Negombo, Gampaha district, in Sri Lanka. Photo: IOM Sri Lanka.*

The 210 containers of timber were transported to Sri Lanka in five shipments staggered over several months, the first arriving in June 2005. It is the largest single order for timber in Australia this year and because of its size, was too big to acquire from one plantation alone. The timber was sourced from all over Australia through the Australian Plantation Products and Paper Industry Council (A3P).



*Australian plantation pine is loaded onto an IOM truck, ready for transport to tsunami-affected districts. Photo: IOM Sri Lanka.*

The timber has been received by a consortium of international and local non-government organisations including Caritas, Islamic Relief, GOAL and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) which also providing logistical support and organised transportation of the timber to reconstruction sites in tsunami-affected districts.

About half of the timber has been used to construct 2,350 temporary shelters benefiting 11,180 people, as well as community centres, schools, sewing rooms, kitchens and other

buildings. A further 1,250 shelters and 150 classrooms will be built with the timber.

The timber remaining in Colombo is being treated for use in permanent shelters. The treatment protects the wood against insects and tropical weather conditions, making it capable of lasting up to 20 years.

While aid agencies are purchasing some construction materials locally, the Australian timber helps to reduce damage to the local environment and minimise local timber shortages.



*A transitional house in Kalutara, Sri Lanka, built with Australian timber. Photo: IOM Sri Lanka.*

Oxfam Australia's Tsunami Emergency Response Manager Peter Chamberlain says there were logistical challenges involved in shipping the timber to Sri Lanka.

"This was a completely new area for us. There were all sorts of things we had to look at, like environmental impacts, what length and size the timber needed to be cut to and where the timber would go," Peter says.

"We also had to get approvals from the Forestry Commission in Sri Lanka to import the timber. To do this, we had to prove that the timber could not be obtained sustainably from within Sri Lanka itself.

"Then there were delays with delivery — the timber had to be transported via Singapore or Taiwan as there are no direct shipping routes between Australia and Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Government waived import duties on the timber, which we are very grateful for."

Peter says Oxfam Australia has insisted that the agencies receiving the timber comply with International Sphere Standards for shelter construction and provide regular reports about the progress of work.

"Because there are such a diverse range of NGOs receiving the timber, these stipulations allows us to have some degree of control over the end product and influence the way construction work takes place," he says. "It also makes sure the NGOs are accountable in how they use the timber."

Oxfam Australia is also working on a similar project to provide timber to tsunami-affected regions in Aceh, Indonesia. In early December the first shipment of 650 cubic metres left for Aceh, as part of a pilot project.

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