

# Sourcing and Using Home-Grown Wood Products

Sylva Foundation's views and actions

June 2022 (v.1.4)

## Background

The area of woodland in the UK is estimated to be 3.2M hectares (13%); meaning that it is the second least-wooded country in Europe. A significant proportion of woodland area (44%) has been certified under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme. However, a similar area of woodland (e.g. 42% in England) is without a management plan compliant with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS). Such non-compliant UKFS woodlands may be failing to deliver benefits to society, the environment, and to the UK economy.

### *What is a Home-Grown Wood Product?*

A home-grown wood product is any timber or wood product derived from trees and forests grown in the UK.

The UK is the second largest importer of timber of any country in the world (second only to China), including 7.2M m<sup>3</sup> of sawnwood and 5.3M tonnes of pulp and paper, amounting to £7.5 billion worth of imports<sup>i</sup>. From its own forests, the UK produces 3.3M m<sup>3</sup> of sawnwood, 3.0M m<sup>3</sup> of wood-based panels, and 3.6M m<sup>3</sup> of paper product<sup>ii</sup>.

It may seem obvious that a country with low woodland cover may be reliant on timber imports for much of its needs, however the current low level of woodland management in the UK is a real concern. Not only does a reliance on wood product imports leads to significant carbon footprint due to transportation ('wood-miles'), but the under-performance of the UK timber market means that woodland owners may remain unmotivated to improve the condition of their woodlands, or even to invest in creating new woodland. Good woodland management (as measured against the UKFS) is closely linked not only to the economy, but also to the environmental condition of our woodlands<sup>iii</sup>.

## Sylva Foundation's views on sourcing and using home-grown wood products

**Using more wood products sourced from UK forests will stimulate our economy while improving the environmental condition of more woodlands, reducing wood-miles (carbon footprint of importing timber), and help reconnect people with the benefits of a working countryside.**

1. **Sylva Foundation's vision is for a society that cares for nature while living in harmony with it.** We envisage a wood culture where people understand and promote the good stewardship of woodlands and are mindful of their utility, while being conscious of their fragility. We are working to help future society recognise the creative and productive value of forest products which can be derived from growing well-managed forests, and at the same time enhance their wider benefits for people and for nature. This will help result in a halt in the loss of biodiversity, a reduction in climate change, and a human society that can sustain itself.
2. **Much of the UK's wildlife has adapted to thrive in managed forests.** The perception that an untouched or unmanaged woodland is best for wildlife is largely false. It is true that 'non-intervention' may be the best form of management for some species, but this is quite different from neglect arising from lack of awareness and poor knowledge. Sylva Foundation encourages woodland owners to make a conscious decision to manage a woodland to support the environment, economy and society while meeting their own interests. This is why a management plan compliant with the UK Forestry Standard is critically important. Producing timber or other wood products can be important outcome for many owners in helping them to afford the management of a woodland to achieve a range of benefits to society and the environment. In other words, there may be a financial barrier to forest management, and sometimes this can be accentuated by the absence of viable timber markets and/or local timber processing infrastructure.
3. **Currently there is low awareness of the provenance of wood products among users and consumers, and therefore a lack of awareness of the resulting consequences for the environment and economy.** Many people are aware of forest certification schemes, like FSC or PEFC, but do not realise that provenance or wood miles do not feature specifically as a part of their criteria. Among users of wood products, the lack of awareness is only made worse by the actions of powerful wood marketing campaigns run by foreign countries. These are often very well resourced, resulting in excellent marketing of foreign wood products along with simple procurement options. Grown in Britain (GIB) was established in 2011 to address the importance of source (UK provenance) alongside responsible procurement. The work of GIB is critically important and deserves greater prominence and recognition by policymakers, wood users, and consumers alike. Currently, the UK government's Timber Procurement Policy, and the criteria commonly adopted by large corporations, is to require certified wood products (*i.e.* FSC/PEFC) with little consideration or acceptance of provenance. We

believe that such approaches are at odds with some aspects of sustainability (wood-miles), society (local employment), and biosecurity (risks from import).

4. **There is a perception among UK users of wood products that supply is limited and/or that quality is poor.** It is important to note that there is a global timber shortage. It is also the case that currently the woodchain in the UK is poorly organised, especially for less mainstream timbers and smaller-scale wood processors. We recognise that this provides an opportunity for future development and investment (see Action 4 below). Even so, with a little more effort, it is possible to find supplies of home-grown wood products for many purposes. The growing conditions of the UK affect the way that trees grow, and as a result the qualities of resulting timber and other wood products. For instance, many species grow faster in the UK than when growing in Scandinavia or North America, meaning that they can be less strong. Forestry (e.g. tree breeding) and timber research continues to address these points, resulting in a growing number of wood products that can be produced from home-grown timbers. Equally, advances in wood engineering are capable of producing new products from a wider range of timber qualities than ever before.

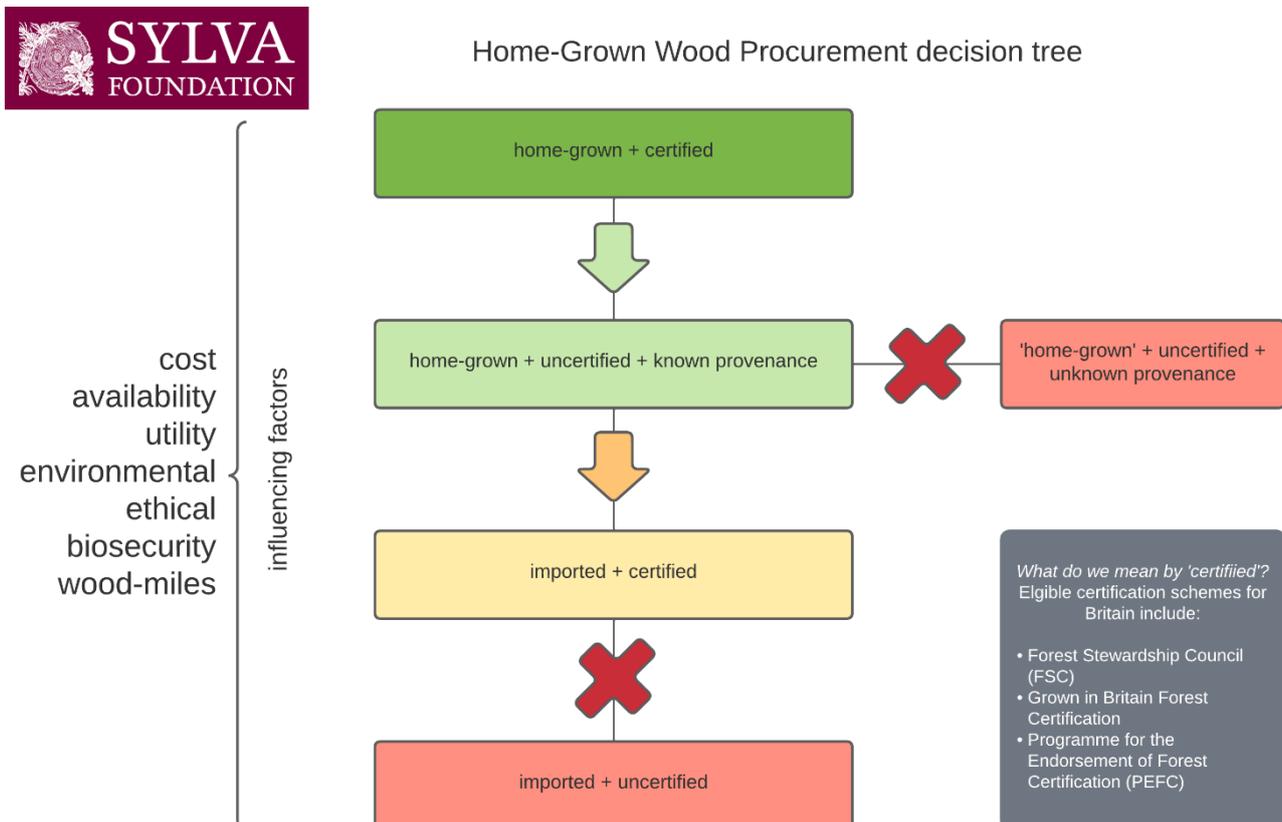
## Sylva Foundation will:

### Action 1

**Sylva Foundation will advocate a hierarchal approach, placing a preference for home-grown wood products above some certified wood products.**

The legal and sustainable standards that apply to UK forestry mean that for small volumes of wood products, even if not formally certified, there is low risk in both these contexts, with the added benefit that there will be low wood-miles for the timber or wood product, while purchasers will also be supporting the local economy.

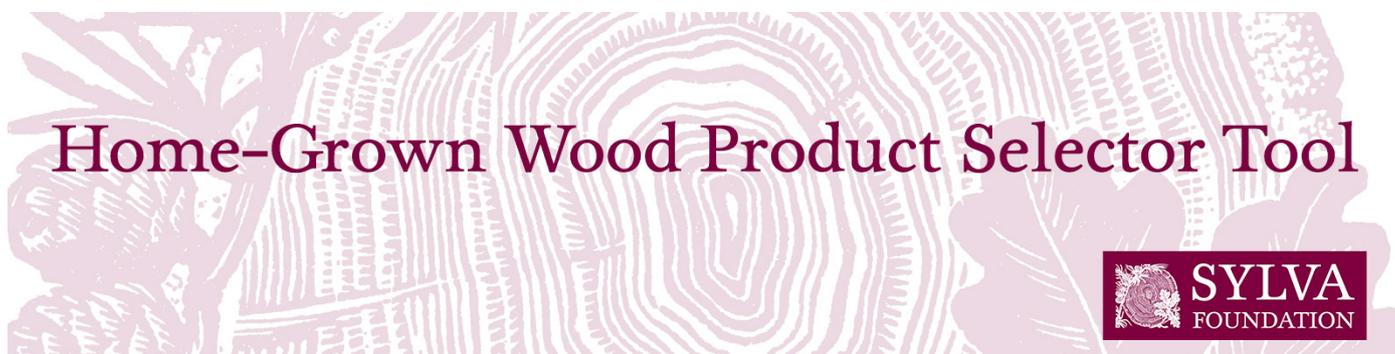
Our simple 'traffic light' approach is illustrated below. The intention is to encourage choices which begin with [home-grown + certified] in preference to [home-grown + uncertified + known provenance]. Critically, it is important to note that the second-best choice [home-grown + uncertified + known provenance] is placed in preference to [imported + certified] and that this is at odds to current practice including government's Timber Procurement Policy, and likely to be a challenge to certification schemes. Our 'red lines' are that no wood products that are imported and uncertified should ever be used. Timber that is uncertified, even if marketed as 'home-grown', but of an unknown provenance should not be used as this presents a potential risk in being an imported material.



We recognise that there are number of factors that will influence choice among users, including: cost, availability, utility (e.g. strength, density, appearance etc.), environmental considerations, ethical considerations, biosecurity, and wood-miles (e.g. carbon footprint).

### *Action 2*

**Sylva Foundation will develop and make freely available a decision support tool to aid good environmental and ethical decision making by users of wood products.**



Sylva Foundation has developed a beta version of a [Home-Grown Wood Product Selector](#) decision support tool. This tool is provided free to use and aims to guide wood product users in decision making for sourcing timber and wood products in the UK. Sylva Foundation aims to develop this tool further with support from partners, and if investment can be attracted, develop a simple mobile application to improve accessibility and user experience.



### *Action 3*

**Sylva Foundation will be proactive in supporting the mission and activities of Grown in Britain.**

Sylva Foundation will work strategically and in partnership with Grown in Britain to promote its mission and activities at a national level. Examples will include promoting GIB in its myForest platform and advocating the work of GIB in its education activities.

Sylva Foundation shall ensure that its own woodland gains GIB Forest Certification. Sylva Foundation will work towards gaining Grown in Britain Forest Product (GIB-FP) certification for outputs from its Wood School. Sylva Foundation will promote GIB to all tenants and other parties connected to the Sylva Wood Centre.

### *Action 4*

**Sylva Foundation will explore how best to improve the UK woodchain.**

We will work in partnership to explore and research what can be done to improve the growing, sourcing, and marketing of home-grown timber. This will require collaboration between different actors in the forestry and wood-producing sectors, and the raising of funds to support research and the delivery of any resulting tools and services.

## **Known Issues**

The following issues are recognised and attempts will be made to resolve them in future updates versions of this policy and, where strategic in nature, more widely by the work of Sylva Foundation:

1. This policy (v.1.4) needs to be openly discussed with forest certification bodies, and any concerns or recommendations considered.
2. The Home-Grown Wood Product Selector Tool needs to be tested by more users and feedback considered.
3. More evidence would be beneficial exploring the benefits of home-grown timber, especially relating to sustainability, society, and biosecurity.
4. Research is needed to understand the barriers and opportunities to encouraging wider adoption of Grown in Britain GIB-FP certification by government and big business.
5. Market research is required to understand user and consumer behaviour in connection to timber and wood product properties and characteristics.

## Further Reading and Resources

**Grown in Britain** works at every stage of the forest product supply chain to support the use of UK timber. Grown in Britain certification reduces unnecessary imports, by encouraging and supporting active and sustainable management of our own forests and woodlands. Grown in Britain provides both forest certification, and forest product (GIB-FP) certification. [www.growninbritain.org](http://www.growninbritain.org)

**Forest Stewardship Council** (FSC) forest management certification confirms that the forest is being managed in a way that preserves biological diversity and benefits the lives of local people and workers, while ensuring it sustains economic viability. FSC-certified forests are managed to strict environmental, social and economic standards. [www.uk.fsc.org](http://www.uk.fsc.org)

**The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification** (PEFC) an international non-profit, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting sustainable forest management through independent third-party certification. PEFC works throughout the entire forest supply chain to promote good practice in the forest and to ensure that timber and non-timber forest products are produced with respect for the highest ecological, social and ethical standards. [www.pefc.co.uk](http://www.pefc.co.uk)

**Wildlife Link** (a body that includes the UK's key conservation organisations) produced a position statement in 2009 highlighting the importance of woodland management for biodiversity.

[www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2009/Link\\_position\\_statement\\_Woodfuel\\_Strategy\\_03Jul09.pdf](http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2009/Link_position_statement_Woodfuel_Strategy_03Jul09.pdf)

**Confor** is the UK body supporting sustainable forestry and wood-using business through political engagement, market promotion, and supporting member competitiveness. It provides a comprehensive resources library. [www.confor.org.uk](http://www.confor.org.uk)

**Forestry** is a devolved responsibility among UK nations:

Forestry Commission (England) [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission)

Forest Service (Northern Ireland) [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/forest-service](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/forest-service)

Natural Resources Wales for Wales [www.naturalresources.wales](http://www.naturalresources.wales)

Scottish Forestry [www.forestry.gov.scot](http://www.forestry.gov.scot)

**myForest** is an online platform provided by Sylva Foundation to support land owners and managers in sustainable forest management, including providing mapping and inventory tools, decision support tools, and outputs including outputs required by regulatory bodies. [www.myforest.sylva.org.uk](http://www.myforest.sylva.org.uk)

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<sup>i</sup><https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2021/3-trade/>

<sup>ii</sup><https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2021/2-uk-grown-timber/>

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2009/Link\\_position\\_statement\\_Woodfuel\\_Strategy\\_03Jul09.pdf](https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2009/Link_position_statement_Woodfuel_Strategy_03Jul09.pdf)