



#### Contact details

- Bart van Besien (Policy Officer, Oxfam-Wereldwinkels)  
+32 4 96 17 51 61; [Bart.VanBesien@oww.be](mailto:Bart.VanBesien@oww.be)
- Julia Christian (Forest Campaigner, Fern)  
+32 4 87 85 85 29; [Julia@fern.org](mailto:Julia@fern.org)
- Etelle Higonnet (Senior Advisor, Mighty Earth)  
+1 202 848 7792; [Etelle@mightyearth.org](mailto:Etelle@mightyearth.org)
- Béatrice Wedeux (Forest Policy Officer, WWF-Belgium)  
+32 478780117; [Beatrice.Wedeux@wwf.be](mailto:Beatrice.Wedeux@wwf.be)

## Belgium joins countries calling on the European Commission to act on deforestation

*Antwerp, 5/12/2018* - Belgium today presented an [Initiative](#) calling on the European Commission to “develop an ambitious action plan against deforestation and forest degradation before the end of the current mandate of the European Commission (mid 2019)”.

It is the seventh European Union (EU) Member State to do so, following a [letter](#) sent by Denmark, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Italy in November 2018. It is the first time that Belgium has made such a specific call.

“Belgium’s stance means that there’s now overwhelming momentum for the Commission to act. Member States, companies and civil society expect ambitious action on deforestation caused by Europeans’ consumption—and increasingly, they agree this must include regulation.” Said Julia Christian, forests campaigner at Fern.

This recommendation is part of a sustainability initiative on chocolate, set up by the Belgium government, chocolate companies and civil society, which aims to provide a fair income to cocoa producers and stop deforestation driven by cocoa production by 2030.

The initiative also calls on the European Commission to propose a due diligence regulation for the cocoa sector, describing it as “particularly ripe for legislation addressing the root causes of and interlinkages between human rights violations and deforestation”.

This follows calls made at the World Cocoa Conference earlier this year, where chocolate companies agreed in a common [declaration](#) that there was a need to “strengthen human rights due diligence, including through potential regulatory measures by governments.”

“At the EU level, Belgium has real leverage to halt deforestation and human rights abuses in the cocoa sector. Today’s call for action is an important step in the right direction”, said Beatrice Wedeux, Forest Policy Officer at WWF Belgium.

Belgium is the second biggest exporter of chocolate in the world (after Germany), and produces 600.000 tonnes of chocolate annually. However, in recent years Belgium has not been very involved in discussions on sustainability in the cocoa sector.

“Belgium has one of the world’s most iconic chocolate traditions, but it has been slower to take action on the human rights and environmental abuses contained in our famous truffles. We are delighted to see Belgium now taking the lead, and urge other countries to follow suit,” said Bart van Besien, Policy Officer at Oxfam-Wereldwinkels.

“Deforestation in the cocoa sector is directly linked with the extreme poverty in which cocoa farmers live. At the same time as stopping deforestation, we need to ensure that cocoa farmers make a living income,” said van Besien.

## **Background**

Full text of the initiative can be found here: [French version](#), [Dutch version](#).

Recent [studies](#) have shown that cocoa is the number one cause of deforestation in West-Africa.

Moreover, the majority of cocoa farmers live in extreme poverty, earning far less than what they need for a decent living. Recent [studies](#) have shown that cocoa farmers earn on average about a third of what they need to achieve a living income.

Belgium is one of the largest importers of cocoa beans. Every year more than 300,000 tonnes of cocoa beans enter via the port of Antwerp. Belgium is the third largest importer of cocoa beans in Europe after the Netherlands and Germany. The port of Antwerp is not only important for the Belgian chocolate sector but is also an important port for cocoa beans for industry in Germany, the Netherlands, France and other EU countries.

The Belgian chocolate sector accounts for an annual turnover of almost five billion euros. There are approximately five hundred companies active in the cocoa processing industry and chocolate sector, ranging from large multinationals to Small and Medium Enterprises and artisanal chocolatiers. Every year almost 600,000 tons are exported by Belgian chocolate makers to EU countries as well as the USA and Japan. This makes Belgium the second largest chocolate exporter in the world.

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