

GOVT MAINTAINS HARDLINE STANCE ON RAW TIMBER EXPORT BAN

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Namibia's longstanding prohibition on the export of raw and unprocessed timber is aimed at curbing environmental degradation, creating local jobs and ensuring that the country derives greater economic value from its forest resources, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism has confirmed.

In an interview with Namibian Sun, the ministry's chief forester, Jonas Mwiikinghi, said the ban is enforced through forest regulations that restrict timber exports unless the products have been processed or semi-processed to prescribed standards and size limits.

"No raw timber material is allowed to be exported outside Namibia," Mwiikinghi said. "Timber must be processed, refined or semi-processed, and it must not exceed 15 centimetres in diameter."

The restriction is contained in Regulations 7 and 12 of the Forest Regulations introduced in 2015, which ended the practice of exporting unprocessed logs that had previously been allowed. According to Mwiikinghi, the policy shift was driven by the need to promote local value addition, discourage the depletion of forest resources and stimulate employment within Namibia's timber industry.

"The aim is to make sure the timber industry contributes to job creation inside the country. Value must be added locally before the product is exported," he said.

Mwiikinghi explained that while the Forest Act and Forest Regulations clearly restrict the export of raw and semi-processed timber, implementation has been managed carefully to balance environmental protection with economic sustainability.

"The law is clear," he said. "However, as a ministry, we must also consider job creation and economic sustainability. That is why the focus has been on encouraging value addition rather than completely shutting down timber exports."

He stressed that all timber exporters are required to obtain export permits before consignments are allowed to leave the country, adding that ports will not load timber without authorisation from forestry authorities.

"If there is no export permit, that consignment cannot be exported. The restriction is enforced at the point of export," Mwiikinghi said.

Most Namibian timber exports are destined for Asian markets, particularly China, while some processed products are sold regionally, including to South Africa. To further discourage raw exports, government applies differentiated export charges, with unprocessed or minimally processed timber attracting higher levies than finished products.

"The cost factor is deliberate," he said. "If it becomes expensive to export raw material, exporters will focus on finished products, which are charged less."

The ministry has also addressed public concern over the frequent sight of trucks transporting logs on Namibian roads. Mwiikinghi clarified that many of these vehicles are transporting transit timber from neighbouring countries such as Zambia, passing through Namibia en route to ports.

"These are not necessarily Namibian timber products," he said. "Transit timber is governed by separate provisions, and value addition cannot be enforced on transit goods."

Illegal harvesting, transportation or export of timber without valid permits constitutes an offence under the Forest Act of 2001, as amended. Penalties range from admission-of-guilt fines to criminal prosecution, depending on the severity of the offence.

Timber seized during enforcement operations is confiscated and becomes state property. Confiscated timber may only be disposed of through regulated processes, including public auctions or donation to public institutions, once court proceedings have been finalised.

Mwiikinghi said illegal logging has been declining since 2023 due to tighter controls, increased enforcement and improved public awareness, although sporadic cases continue to be reported.