



fern

MAKING THE EU WORK
FOR PEOPLE & FORESTS

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

January to December

Fern's theory of change

Forests are essential to life on earth: they maintain biodiversity and protect land and water. More than 1.6 billion people rely on them for their livelihoods, and they're critical in the fight against climate change. What's more, as the weather becomes deadlier and hurricanes, droughts and floods intensify, forests can offer some protection. Yet the threats against forests are multiplying. Around the world forests are being plundered for timber and cleared to make way for mines, infrastructure and agriculture. We identify the threats facing the world's forests, and work with affected peoples, social and environmental organisations and policy makers to devise and deliver solutions. Our purpose, as a Europe-based NGO, is to address the root causes of this forest destruction from a European perspective. As the number one global trade and aid power, the EU has an immense influence on the world's forests and the people who depend on them. Our close work with partners in the global South and Europe shapes and drives our campaigns and is vital to bring about lasting change on the ground. Fern makes decisions by consensus and all our campaigns are built in close collaboration with social and environmental organisations and movements across the world.



MARLON DEL AGUILA GUERRERO/CIFOR

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HANNAH MOWAT
Fern Campaigns
Coordinator

2021

A HARVEST YEAR

IN MARCH 2015, to celebrate our 20th anniversary, we released a report – [Stolen Goods](#) – exposing the colossal scale of illegal deforestation behind the EU’s imports of agricultural commodities, as well as an action plan for how to tackle it. “Our supermarkets have been converted into crime scenes,” our Board member David Kaimowitz [memorably](#) said at the report’s launch at the European Parliament. “Large farms and ranches are clearing millions of hectares of tropical forests for soy, beef, palm oil, sugar and cocoa, much of it for export.” He pointed to the statistics proving that this illegal deforestation was fuelling climate breakdown and displacing Indigenous Peoples. Not everyone was convinced. “I must say I’m not sure that the kind of study with ‘Stolen Goods and the complicity of the EU’ is the kind of message that does either justice nor helps the debate to move forward in a real way,” noted Karl Falkenberg, then the European Commission’s Director General of Environment, who was in attendance.



By 2021, however, the EU’s complicity in illegal tropical deforestation had not just become an urgent policy concern, but the European Commission put forward a landmark proposal to try to address it. Fern can chart a causal line from 2015 and our early, lonely campaigning on the issue, to November 17, 2021, the day that Commission published a proposed [Regulation on deforestation-free products](#). This Regulation will – for the first time – make it a legal requirement for products placed on the EU market to be deforestation and degradation-free: a huge milestone, which Stolen Goods and its accompanying action plan were a marker on the journey towards. For Fern, the early years campaigning to rid EU supply chains of the stain of environmental and human rights abuses were [locust](#) years. By contrast, 2021 was a harvest year – and not just because of the breakthrough on the deforestation Regulation.

SUCCESSSES – In 2021 the European Commission put biodiversity and climate at the heart of its Forest Strategy for the first time and made a commitment to regulate European forest management. This was a fight we believed the Commission would never pick. But it did, because it realised not doing so would fatally undermine its net zero greenhouse gas emissions goal.

"By 2021, the European Commission put forward a landmark proposal to try to address illegal tropical deforestation."



There was also a positive shift on arguably the EU's most misguided policy of recent years: the subsidised burning of biomass for energy. The Commission proposed de-classifying certain types of bioenergy from its Renewable Energy Directive (RED). Then the liberal Finnish rapporteur for the file went even further, proposing to remove financial subsidies from all forest biomass – a key Fern campaign ask. While a step in the right direction, ultimately, the EU needs to exclude bioenergy altogether from counting towards renewable energy targets. In 2021, the Commission officially put the brake on signing the Mercosur-EU Free Trade Agreement, over concerns about deforestation in the Amazon – concerns which Fern and our partners have highlighted unceasingly since the deal was announced in June 2019.

DYNAMISM – In a world where the news can often seem relentlessly bleak, and fighting climate breakdown an uphill battle, these successes give us hope and fortify us for the challenges ahead. With an ambitious European Commission at its mid-point, we are working to capitalise on 2021's successes. For our Consumption Campaign, this means working with our partners to ensure that land rights are included in the Regulation's due diligence requirements and preventing the EU timber-related industry from weakening it. The Climate team will work to ensure the Commission's commitments for a new regulation on forest monitoring, strategic planning and forest management indicators, made in the 2030 Forest Strategy, are fulfilled and effective. We will also build on our work with ecological foresters, as a way of splitting the industry's opposition to any changes to forest management, and showing that as a rights-based organisation with social justice at the core of our mission, Fern always considers the social impacts of changes we propose.

In 2021, the Development team, our partners and civil society groups from around the world campaigned tirelessly – and [successfully](#) – to stop the EU from discarding its best weapon in the fight against illegal logging: the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade regulation, and its accompanying Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs). We will now harness this energy to push for more dynamism in implementing the VPAs, while continuing to open space for our partners.

VALUES – Within Fern, as for the rest of the world, 2021 was another year defined to a large degree by COVID-19. While the challenges we faced paled by comparison with those endured by so many others, Fern showed itself to be a remarkably resilient organisation: leaning on peoples' ability to self-care and on our deep trust in each other. This allowed us to give colleagues high levels of flexibility to do whatever was needed to survive at work, whether it was flexible working to look after kids or parents or encouraging each other to take time away from screens. As an organisation dedicated to social and environmental justice, it is vital that our values are reflected in our own working practices: something which we will continue to strive for in 2022 and the years ahead.





FEBRUARY

Fern and 188 groups call on governments, businesses, investors, non-profits, and civil society to reject single-use products.

MARCH

Fern releases 'Five ways the EU can ensure forests support EU climate and biodiversity goals.'

APRIL

Civil society around the world comes together to call on the EU to raise the bar on efforts to improve forest governance.

JANUARY

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen calls forests our "key ally in our fight against climate change."



MAY

In the run-up to the United Nations' climate conference Fern says trade, environmental protection and social justice shouldn't be mutually exclusive.

FERN'S YEAR IN REVIEW

JUNE

Commission's proposed Forest Strategy includes many of the policies Fern has been calling for.

AUGUST

Forests grow but Fern rests.



OCTOBER

Fern raises awareness of problems with Nature-based Solutions at the UN Climate Conference in Glasgow.

DECEMBER

Commission steps away from plans to scrap key elements of its Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Regulation.

JULY

Fern challenges the proposed role for forest bioenergy in the Commission's revised climate and energy package.

SEPTEMBER

Fern publishes joint briefing outlining the importance of considering smallholders in the EU Regulation on deforestation-free products.

NOVEMBER

EU finally releases EU Regulation on deforestation-free products, including many of Fern's asks.

2021

JANUARY

In keeping with tradition, one of our first tasks in January is sending out our [New Year Message](#). This outlines Fern's hopes and fears for the year. Not only does it help alert our fellow NGOs of the upcoming forest issues, it also gives us something to look back on to see if we've achieved what we set out to do. As this timeline shows, in many ways we ended up surpassing some of our hopes, even when the pandemic caused the continued postponement of events such as the United Nations Biodiversity Conference.

With face-to-face meetings forbidden, we focussed on producing accessible on-line material to explain the issues we would normally talk about in person. Since lockdown, we have launched several Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) webpages, such as this one on [community forestry](#). These short, easy-to-understand webpages give a snapshot of the problems faced, and what can be done about them. They have also massively increased visitors to Fern's site.

But it wasn't just Fern starting the year thinking about the urgency of protecting forests. At the [One Planet Summit](#) in Paris, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said: *"When we lose forests, we don't 'just' lose green space or natural habitat. We lose a key ally in our fight against climate change."* Her focus on forests seemed like a watershed in the EU's commitment to

protect forests. Never in our 25+ year history has a Commission President spoken so extensively and in such detail about deforestation. It was an unequivocal sign of the EU's desire to be the global leader on deforestation. But as [we responded at the time](#), for this to happen, the EU must focus on tackling the major drivers of forest loss – in particular EU trade policy, EU bioenergy policy, and the fragility of community rights over forest land.

January was a particularly busy month. Not only did we release [our assessment](#) of the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation, which showed that the EU needed to solve five major flaws if the Regulation is to help end destructive bioenergy, we also released our position on the [EU Mercosur Trade Agreement](#). This detailed why the very objective of the agreement is problematic: aiming to increase trade in the agricultural products that drive deforestation in South America. We called for peoples and forests to be put at the heart of the agreement.

We also released the second issue of our [forest governance newsletter](#) which an outlet for our partners in timber producing countries to explain the problems on the ground and what they are doing to solve them. If you wish to sign up for this, or our monthly newsletter ForestWatch, [click here](#).



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

FEBRUARY

Even though it was still 10 months away, February saw many of our partners thinking about what could be achieved at the [26th United Nations Climate Conference \(COP26\)](#). Fern was particularly concerned that the Conference would see countries and companies looking to [offset](#) rather than reduce their emissions.

Having been unable to visit our partners for a year due to the COVID crisis, we had to find new ways to ensure they could raise their voices remotely in EU discussions. For example, this article about the [Forest Code in the Republic of Congo](#) helped encourage the Commission to think about how civil society is involved in designing the Nationally

Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Climate Agreement.

The pandemic was still very much in our thoughts when we released [COVID, forests and forest peoples: The implications of the pandemic for forest campaigns](#). This paper investigates the links between forests and various aspects of pandemic recovery—from the prevention of zoonotic diseases, to job creation, to being a lifeline for poor communities during troubled economic times.

One of the issues the report raised was the vast increase in disposable materials due to COVID-19. We joined together with 188 other groups to [“make the throwaway go away.”](#)



MARCH

In 2021 saw more visitors to Fern's website than ever. This was partly because so many people were working from home, and partly because of our efforts to produce more web-friendly material, such as this FAQ on [why it is important to fight illegal logging](#), and this one on the [causes of deforestation](#). Our FAQs take Fern's material, which is often quite specialised, and reformats the key information so that a more general audience can

understand the links between forests, human rights, climate and more.

We also joined with the [STOP EU-MERCUSOR](#) coalition to call on leaders from both sides of the Atlantic to stop the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) discussions, on the grounds that it would further incentivise destruction and biodiversity collapse in the Amazon, the Cerrado and the Gran Chaco. We argued that stopping negotiations now would



ONDREJ KAMENIAR

send a strong political signal that the horrific human rights abuses linked to the supply chains associated with the deal are unacceptable. We also produced a [press release](#) highlighting that the European Ombudsman reprimanded the European Commission for failing to consider the deal's environmental and social impacts, after the issue was raised by Fern and other NGOs.

As well as being pivotal for global climate policies, 2021 was meant to be a landmark year for countries to tackle the biodiversity crisis, and bring back nature. In all of our work we try to keep reminding decision-makers that the climate and biodiversity crises cannot be tackled separately. Typical examples include the briefing [Five ways the EU can ensure forests support EU climate and biodiversity goals](#), and our response to the [Forest Strategy consultation](#).

Many businesses try to tout tree planting as the solution to these crises, yet the truth is much more complicated. On the International Day of Forests we released an article explaining why using [forest planting and restoration as an offset](#) undermines all the good that they do for the climate, and on the same day wrote to European Commission President von der Leyen, asking her to keep forests out of carbon trading.

For more than a decade, Fern has campaigned against forest offsets, our notable successes

include ensuring that forest offsets are not allowed in [the EU Emissions Trading Scheme](#). We remain hopeful that our messages will be taken on board as von der Leyen is the first Commission President to recognise how important forests are to life on our planet. We produced [this briefing](#) outlining the answers to the questions posed in the Forest Strategy consultation which, if implemented, would ensure it achieves its potential. After years of being toothless, we explained how the Strategy could have a positive impact.

Following the 2020 launch of our report on the importance of a Regulation to ensure companies conduct due diligence to prevent forest risk commodities don't cause deforestation or harm human rights, we hosted an event to discuss the recommendations. It's available on Fern's [YouTube](#) channel.

Throughout 2021 we worked closely with the Estonian Fund for Nature (ELF) who we interviewed for 2020's [Annual Report](#). In this [Press Release](#) we revealed a surge in logging in Estonia, its causes and its damaging impact on biodiversity.

Moving to international forest policy, we monitored the little [understood NDCs](#), examining whether their effect on tropical forests will be positive or negative. The report concludes that to achieve bold climate objectives countries must put their collective foot down.



APRIL

Most of Fern's work is specifically focused on decision-makers and experts, but there are occasions when we need to encourage other NGOs or even the general public to be involved, to show that there is a groundswell of public support for our advocacy. In April we therefore produced two dramatically different types of material, both focussing on the problems of burning biomass for energy. The first, [How Bioenergy Harms Biodiversity](#) outlines the issues simply, while our [Analysis on biomass in National Energy and Climate Plans](#), looks in detail at future plans for bioenergy in Europe and the effect it would have on the climate. The second, [Why bioenergy is not a climate solution](#), was released in June.

Another niche piece of work was on the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) which the vast majority of European citizens would not have heard of. Being aware of and monitoring such instruments is vital for Fern, and we often raise awareness among other NGOs of their pitfalls and potential. On this occasion we helped coordinate nine large NGOs to call for EU development



programmes that listen to [local peoples' views](#).

We also dived into the world of impenetrable policy with a [blog](#) on the Taxonomy Regulation, explaining why the European Green Deal's success depends on it, and why defining bioenergy as sustainable will have a devastating impact on forests for years to come.

One of our great fears in 2021 was that the EU would drop its flagship Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Regulation. We, and many allied organisations have worked for years on this this ground-breaking scheme to improve the way forests are owned and managed. It was clear that stopping work on this would have a hugely negative effect on forests, as well as on efforts to build civil society's capacity to be involved in decisions that affect them. That is why we collated the views of civil society from around the world to call on the EU [to raise the bar](#).

MAY

As always our work was done in coordination with the many partners and allied organisations we work with around the world. As well as small-scale grassroots organisations, we sometimes work with larger international NGOs to call for large-scale change. For example, having originally been a lone voice calling for an EU Action Plan to end deforestation, some of the largest environmental NGOs joined us to outline the crucial steps needed for the future [EU Regulation to address the forest](#),



MÍDIA NINJA/FLICKR

[ecosystem, and human rights impacts associated with products placed on the EU market.](#)

We were also part of another large coalition, this time with many of the world's biggest human rights organisations, when we responded to another major proposed piece of EU legislation, the [EU Directive in Sustainable Corporate Governance](#). Our joint briefing outlines why and how environmental protection must be integrated into companies' due diligence requirements, alongside respect for human rights.

This month also saw us joining scientists in issuing a Press Release criticising the [International Energy Agency \(IEA\)](#) for relying on bioenergy in its proposal for how to meet climate goals. Days later we released a report with European NGOs outlining why [EU forest biomass standards are not enough to stop forest destruction](#). It concluded

that EU's biomass policy is predicated on the overly simplistic and flawed idea that it can be a source of renewable energy that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions without harming forests. For this to start being true, however, the current rules surrounding it must be immediately and substantially revised.

Just seven months away from the UK's chairing of COP26, Boris Johnson spoke of his plans to spearhead the fight to protect the world's forests. Our newest campaigner Chiara Vitali wrote an [op ed](#) explaining why trade, environmental protection and social justice shouldn't be mutually exclusive.

May was certainly the month for cross-NGO position papers as we also outlined [seven large NGOs' position](#) on what the EU needs to do to create a bioenergy policy based on science, that civil society and citizens can support.

JUNE

By June our first great success of 2021 was taking shape. We had made detailed inputs into the EU's Forest Strategy, and when the Commission published their proposal, we were delighted to find that they had included much of what we had asked for. For the first time, here was a Strategy that would have a real and positive impact on forests and communities. But with the forest industry apparently intent on sabotaging this progress, we went into immediate overdrive to try to prevent this success from backsliding. This meant turning our focus to how the EU could effectively deliver on its commitment to increase monitoring European Forests. Work included organising a webinar with European campaigning organisations looking at the [power of satellite monitoring](#).

Having started the year with little hope that the Forest Strategy would do anything to benefit forests and people, we found ourselves in the unique situation of supporting it, and fighting



the forest industry forces who were clearly also surprised that the EU was planning to challenge business as usual. We joined 67 organisations from 20 countries to let the EU know that [the Forest Strategy must support people, nature and the climate, and not bow to industry pressure](#).

For only the second time in its 32 year history, the [Forest Movement Europe \(FME\)](#)'s annual meeting was postponed, this time as an inevitable consequence of the pandemic. We trialled on-line meetings, but had to accept that there are some things that do not work without face-to-face

meetings. Movement building is one of them. Each FME starts with an update of upcoming EU forest policy developments, and in lieu of a presentation, FME lead, Julia Christian penned an article outlining what [forest campaigners could expect in the coming months](#). Meanwhile the coordinator of the Environmental Paper Network (EPN), Luisa Colasimone, detailed [why paper reduction should be at the forefront of forest campaigners' minds](#).

Part of Fern's mission is supporting civil society around the world to understand how the EU works and how they can use its institutions to further their campaign aims. As part of this work we produced the paper, [A brief guide to the](#)

JULY

Throughout 2021, Fern - and many other NGOs - were focussed on ensuring that the EU's forthcoming Regulation to halt deforestation and degradation was fit for purpose. As such, we worked to ensure that rubber would be included in the list of forest-risk commodities - given its role in driving forest of destruction. We joined other international NGOs in signing on to this [Statement to Commissioner Sinkevičius](#).

Cocoa production's role in destroying forests in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire is well-documented, as is the EU's position as the world's largest cocoa importer, processor and consumer of cocoa - much of which comes from these two countries. Consequently, discussions on the Regulation include consideration of how to end the EU's complicity in deforestation and human rights abuses associated with cocoa. Fern continued supporting our partners in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire so that their voices could be heard when designing policies to remove poverty, deforestation and child labour from cocoa supply chains. Julia Christian followed negotiations and gave [updates](#) throughout the year.

[European Union](#), which succinctly details the EU's structure and decision-making processes - and, most importantly, how activists, civil society representatives and NGOs can influence its policies.

June also saw the release of a detailed evaluation of the how the VPAs have developed in Cameroon, Ghana, Indonesia, Liberia, Republic of Congo and Liberia: [Progress towards strong forest governance in Voluntary Partnership Agreement countries 2018-2020](#). The study was based on extensive interviews with civil society networks coordinating the efforts to improve the forest sectors in those countries.



CARSTEN TEN BRINK/FLICKR

On 14 July the European Commission released its revised 2030 climate and energy package, Fit for 55. Despite decades of campaigning from activists and scientists, the package ignored the studies that show the dramatic global harm done by subsidising the burning of wood for energy.

Martin Pigeon responded: *"Instead of basing policies on its scientific advisors' warnings about the real-life impacts of burning forest biomass, the European Commission gave in to relentless pressure from the bioenergy industry and its allies. It chose to sacrifice forests rather than admit that current EU bioenergy policy is making the climate crisis worse."* Our [press release](#) analysed the many flaws but also highlighted the few glimmers of light.

In contrast to the disappointment with Fit for 55, Fern welcomed the next iteration of the Forest Strategy and especially its proposal to introduce a new EU Forest Observation, Reporting and Data Collection law which could set the ground for a much more informed and healthier debate on the state of EU forests. Our [press release](#) was a rare opportunity to congratulate positive steps in the right direction.

Following these rapid responses we released a [briefing note](#) considering what Fit for 55 means for forests. Its sad conclusion was that the Commission's proposal will do nothing to end the biodiversity and climate crises that we are already living with on a daily basis.

SEPTEMBER

The battle to ensure the EU Regulation on deforestation-free products was as strong as possible continued as we released a joint briefing paper [Including smallholders in EU action to protect and restore the world's forests](#). The draft Regulation could have unintended negative consequences if small producers are unable to comply with it. Our briefing outlined that to succeed, it must involve and support smallholders. Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) to the climate emergency – which include efforts to save, protect and plant trees - have the backing of many large

AUGUST

August is always a quiet month at Fern as the EU Institutions close down, most staff therefore use the opportunity to take a well-earned break.

environmental organisations and businesses. They also have potential unintended negative consequences. Nature cannot be bought, sold and packaged in a way to cover for business-as-usual in terms of carbon emissions and forest destruction. To highlight these dangers, Fern hosted an event looking at how to avoid [Land grabbing in the name of Biodiversity](#).

The number of people subscribing to our monthly Forest Watch newsletter continued to increase every month. See Number Crunching for details and sign up [here](#).



UFOKIM/ADOBE STOCK

OCTOBER



The UK hosted COP26 in Glasgow at the end of October. In some ways it was the culmination of a tranche of Fern's work looking at the EU's role in international forest restoration. Our aim was to ensure that forests were on the agenda in the right way and weren't being used as an excuse to delay moves away from fossil fuels. This meant raising

NOVEMBER

As COP26 continued, Fern hosted a [side event](#) looking at how proposed EU, UK and US deforestation laws will impact Brazil. The event was co-organised with Fern's Brazilian partners [APIB](#) (Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil), and IPAM (Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazonia).

As forests and climate change are so intricately linked, we released several different publications at the COP, coming together with [numerous other NGOs](#) to tell the EU that to protect nature and the climate, we must reform how bioenergy is treated in the EU's Renewable Energy Directive; and joining with Transparency International to release [a report](#) explaining how climate finance can help to protect forests and human rights and improve governance.

awareness of the problems with Nature-Based Solutions (NBS), as well as potentially positive solutions.

To this end, we worked with award-winning writer and Fern Board member Fred Pearce to produce an accessible [blog](#) and [briefing](#) outlining how the world needs a Great Global Forest Restoration. Key to its success though, will be restoring of the rights of forest dwellers: the people who know forests best and have the most reason to defend and nurture them.

But 2021 wasn't just a year of campaigns coming to fruition, we also started new areas of work. After decades of listening to foresters' stories, we decided the time was right to start compiling their thoughts on ways to ensure forestry stops clear-cutting and starts finding ways to take less from the forest, while delivering more local benefits, both economically and for wildlife. We therefore [interviewed several practitioners](#) of close-to-nature forestry to hear about the drawbacks of intensive forestry and the solutions they offered.



Our Communications Manager, Richard Wainwright was on the ground for much of the COP and he produced this article summarising the results "[promises but no action](#)." His analysis was complemented by MidiaNINJA, a Brazilian media collective with 10 million followers across its various channels, who wrote about their experience for Fern's monthly newsletter [ForestWatch](#).

Despite the disappointments of the COP where politicians seemed to be looking for soundbites rather than effective change - November was a game-changing month. First came the release of the long-awaited EU Regulation on deforestation-free products. Fern has been campaigning for such a Regulation since the launch of our report [Stolen Goods](#) in 2015 and much of our year's work had led to this point. On the eve of its release we joined



JIRO OSE/GREENPEACE

with 55+ NGOs from #Together4Forests to outline [our recommendations](#) to Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans. The proposed Regulation was released days later, and included many of our asks, although as we outlined in our [press release](#), it was aimed more at cleaning up supply chains than actually stopping deforestation.

There was further excitement with the release of the final Forest Strategy, which, thanks to Fern and other organisations' tireless advocacy gave the EU the mandate to start healing EU forests. Climate campaigner Kelsey Perlman [responded](#): "Forested countries now need to work together to create strong tools to monitor and improve the health of our forests. EU incentives to produce wood-based products and energy must make way for incentives to protect forests, limit over-logging, and address the effects that climate breakdown is having. [With 85 per cent of the protected forests](#) in poor or bad condition, this has clearly yet to happen!"

DECEMBER

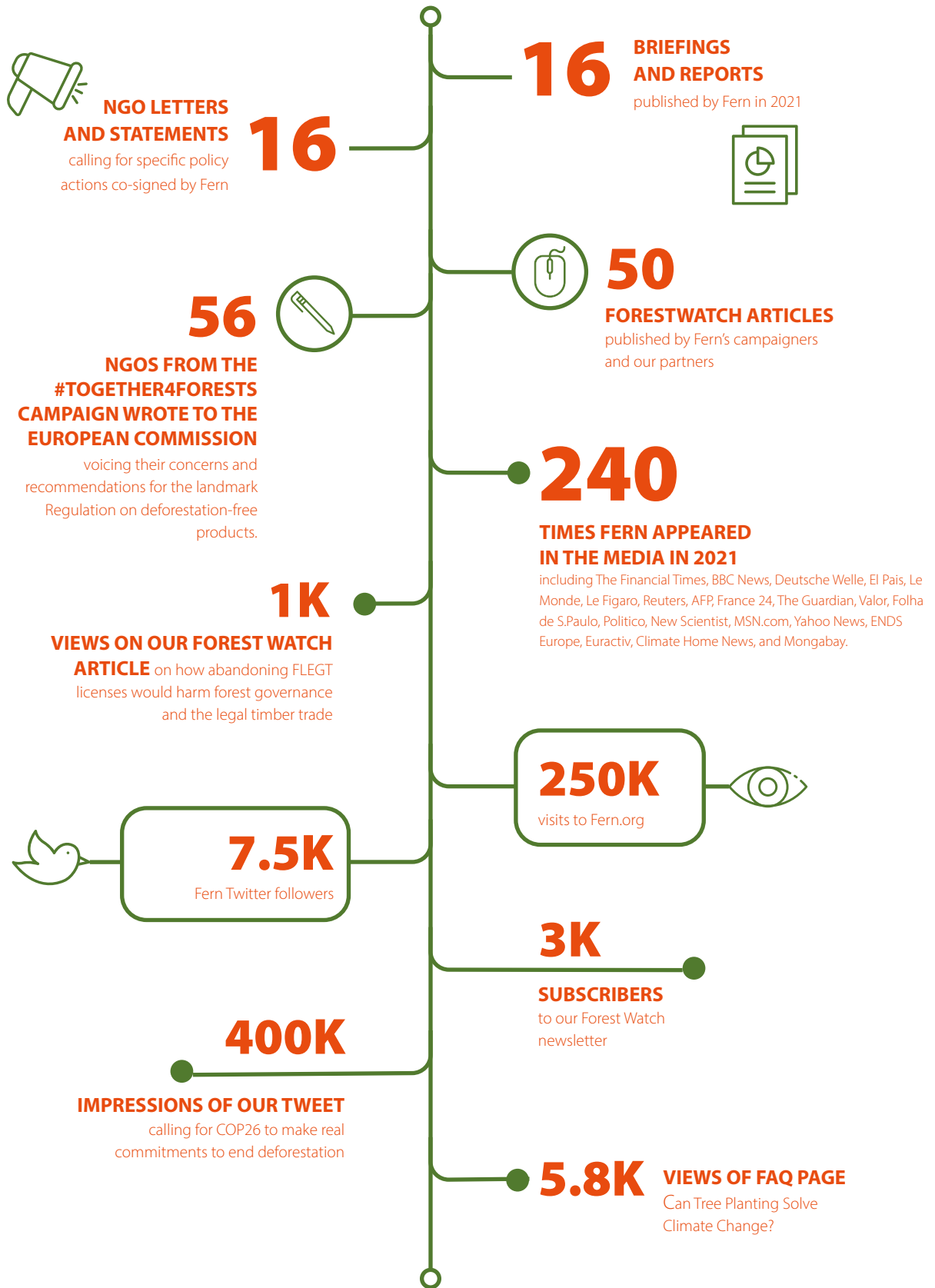
After November's highs, the year still held another campaign victory. In early December we released a [blog](#) explaining that the fight to keep the EU's flagship forest governance policy alive had finally born fruit as the Commission used the launch of the EU Regulation on deforestation-free products to step away from plans to scrap crucial elements of the FLEGT Regulation. Our support for FLEGT does not, however, mean we can't see ways in which it can be improved and so we also launched a report looking at [options for the future](#).

We also published our [deep-dive analysis](#) of the proposed Regulation on deforestation-free products. This briefing made it clear that although it marked a breakthrough in the EU's bid to eliminate deforestation from its supply chains, there is still lots of research to do and

there are loopholes to be filled. Whatever the final Regulation looks like, there will need to be an agreed way to enforce it. We therefore released a [report](#) and [briefing](#) looking at what an EU Forests and Rights Observatory could learn from Brazil – which despite its appalling track record has one of the best monitoring systems in the world.

What a year! We started in lockdown, with fears for FLEGT, with no hope for the EU Forest Strategy and we had no date for the release of the EU Regulation on deforestation-free products. We ended it with FLEGT continuing, a strong Forest Strategy and a draft Regulation. But most importantly, we ended it with the hope that the world is finally beginning to listen to the Indigenous Peoples and local communities who are integral in the fight to protect the world's forests.

Number crunching



Partner focus

MONROVIA CALLING

In recent years, Fern has supported journalists in forested countries to report on critical issues facing their nations' forests. A remarkable investigative journalism project in Liberia is continuing that tradition.

Starting at 4pm every Thursday, one of Liberia's best-known radio stations, [OK FM 99.5](#), broadcasts a live one-hour show that's possibly the only one of its kind in the world. Combining listener phone-ins, interviews and reports from 15 reporters embedded in communities the length and breadth of Liberia, Forest Hour shines a light into the hidden corners of the country's forest sector.

[Broadcasting](#) from a cramped studio in Monrovia, the show's presenter Moses R. Quollin and technical assistant Dida Wreh delve into the critical issues facing Liberia's forests: exposing everything from environmental crimes to dodgy timber deals; from companies failing to pay communities for logging in their areas to illegal harvesting; from forest laws being flouted to women being denied their rights and side-lined from making decisions that affect them. The weekly show, which is simultaneously broadcast on community radio and Facebook, has the potential to reach up to [500,000 listeners](#), and is a



model of public service broadcasting: acting as a watchdog over how one of Liberia's most precious - and threatened - natural resources is governed.

PARADIGM SHIFT – To help chart a different course from the [destruction](#) that has long plagued Liberia's forests, in 2019 Paul M Kanneh and Quollin founded [Liberia Forest Media Watch](#) (LFMW), the group of journalists behind Forest Hour. LFMW also produce in-depth newspaper of forest related stories. "I realised there was an overwhelming need for a specific media group to report on forests," Kanneh explains. "I thought this could be a paradigm shift in the way the media covers forest governance in Liberia." Funding has so far come from [Tropenbos International](#) and the EU, with Fern acting as the contract holder. "Through Saskia [Ozinga], Fern has been very supportive of the work we do," Kanneh says. LFMW's reporters, some of them volunteers, use old-fashioned

"I realised there was an overwhelming need for a specific media group to report on forests."

'shoe leather' journalism (meeting and talking to people, rather than sitting at desks and staring at screens) as well as modern technology, (such as the [ForestLink](#) a [real time monitoring](#) mobile phone app), to uncover what's happening in often remote parts of Liberia's 15 counties.

A common refrain from local communities to the journalists, is that companies aren't providing them with the funds, amenities or other benefits they have been promised - and are [legally entitled](#) to - such as bridges or latrines, which remain unbuilt after many years. LFMW also exposes scandals on a broader scale, such as the [misappropriation](#) of US\$200,000 by two people charged with handling funds intended for community development.

UNLIKELY JOURNEY – Perhaps even more remarkable than LFMW's meteoric rise, are the

unlikely journeys into the media of some of its journalists. Quollin, for instance, grew up in a large family in the Samuel K Doe Community, an impoverished ghetto area of Monrovia. His father died when he was 12, and the family struggled to survive. To help make ends meet, Quollin sold charcoal and mosquito oil for his mother, who has also since died. After working as a volunteer for five years at the Catholic Media Centre, by 2019 Quollin was establishing himself as a producer and presenter at [Radio Maria](#), when Kanneh spotted his talent and they decided to work together, initially as part of a WhatsApp group. Now - as Forest Hour listeners and readers of LFMW's newspaper exposés can confirm - they are proving the truth of the old adage that sunlight really is the best disinfectant.



FROM BIAŁOWIEŻA TO BRUSSELS

Augustyn Mikos' love of nature was instilled in his childhood. But when he saw the destruction of the great Białowieża forest, he decided to dedicate his life to protecting it. The coordinator of forest campaigns at Polish NGO, the Association Workshop for All Beings (Pracownia na rzecz Wszystkich Istot), talks about the campaign to save Białowieża and his organisation's flourishing partnership with Fern.

"I was always sensitive to nature. Despite living in the suburbs of Kraków, I grew up surrounded by it, and spent a lot of time as a kid going to the mountains with my parents. But five years ago, I had an epiphany. It came during a major turning

point for the environmental and nature conservancy movements in Poland. Białowieża forest is the last large fragment of Europe's primeval forest. In 2016 an outbreak of bark beetles started attacking the forest, and our [then] Minister of Environment [Jan Szysko] used it to justify logging. Harvesters came in and were taking the trees out. When the logging started a coalition of NGOs [including the Association Workshop for all Beings] filed a complaint to the European Commission, and people started a protest camp in the forest. I worked in tourism at the time, but when I heard about the protests I went to Białowieża: I wanted to see the forest before it was cut down. I thought I would stay in the protest camp for a couple of days. I ended up staying eight months. Most forests in Poland and Europe are managed monoculture plantations, but Białowieża felt like the first real forest I'd ever seen. The first time I was taken to a clear cut, I saw these huge stumps where the trees had been taken down. This was a shocking moment: I thought something has to be done about it. After that I got more involved, first as a volunteer, then as a campaigner for the Association Workshop for all Beings. Through this massive mobilisation we managed to stop the logging: the European Court of Justice eventually ruled that Poland was breaching EU environmental law and that if it didn't stop logging Białowieża, the government would be fined €100,000 a day. Our organisation is now involved in another campaign to protect Białowieża, this time from the 180 kilometre barrier being built between Belarus and the Polish border, under a special emergency law to stop migrants crossing the border. We've managed to get support from 150 organisations from all over the world, including Fern.

LINKS WIT THE EU – Our relationship with Fern is very good. Around a year ago we identified EU policies as very important for forest protection in Poland. We realised we needed to bring knowledge of what's happening in Poland into the

"The first time I was taken to a clear cut, I saw these huge stumps where the trees had been taken down. This was a shocking moment: I thought something has to be done about it."

Brussels bubble, which we didn't have good access to. We also needed to know what's happening in Brussels better, and be able to respond to it. So found the answer to both these problems in our work with Fern, particularly on efforts to stop trees from being used as a renewable energy source, and forest management, which we want to be as climate-friendly as possible.

Like Fern, we have a flat structure; we have nine staff, and others working on an ad hoc freelance basis. I coordinate a couple of people and am responsible for two of our forest campaigns: putting the projects together, planning, financing and so on. My main focus is international work, which is why I liaise with Fern.

Poland's forest protection movement is very strong, but the core of what we do is trying to give more power to regular citizens, so that they can scrutinise decisions about our forests and hold the people making them to account.

We believe that with support of our international partners, including Fern, we can empower people to have a say in matters concerning our forests - our common good."



CLARE BISSELL
*Adviser to Fern on
Justice, Equity, Diversity
and Inclusion*

EMBEDDING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN OUR WORK

**TACKLING SOCIAL INJUSTICE GOES
HAND-IN-HAND WITH PROTECTING
FORESTS – AND HAS BEEN CENTRAL
TO FERN’S MISSION FROM THE
START. CLARE BISSELL OUTLINES
HOW FERN IS BUILDING ON THIS.**

“Fern has spent years working alongside in-country partners campaigning for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This has always been at the forefront of our approach, enabling us to do things differently to other Brussels-based environmental NGOs. But while we’ve been aware of how power shows up, it doesn’t mean that we’ve done things perfectly. We know that forest destruction is inherently connected to social inequality and structural injustice – and these issues cannot be tackled separately. So we’re trying to build on the roots of our organisation, to ensure we work in equitable ways both internally and externally. We started reviewing our diversity, equity and inclusion practices against wider ambitions for social justice, with a view to integrating this fully across the organisation.

The uprising in the wake of George Floyd’s murder in the US and the reinvigorated Black Lives Matter movement, intensified critiques that were already being made within the environmental movement. A lot of NGOs are dominated by people from a particular background or demographic – generally speaking, white, European and middle class, wealthier individuals – and this affects how we understand the problems we seek to solve. The #GreenBrusselsSoWhite campaign is one example of how organisations are tackling this issue.

At Fern, we’re trying to create a work environment where society’s inequalities aren’t perpetuated, and where there’s an appreciation of human diversity: whether it’s gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, neurodiversity, disability, or cultural differences. However, we don’t want to do something tokenistic. Instead, we’re reviewing our recruitment, mentoring and appraisal practices, as well as our House Rules and communications strategies, creating learning opportunities for staff, and embedding social justice in our new long-term strategy.

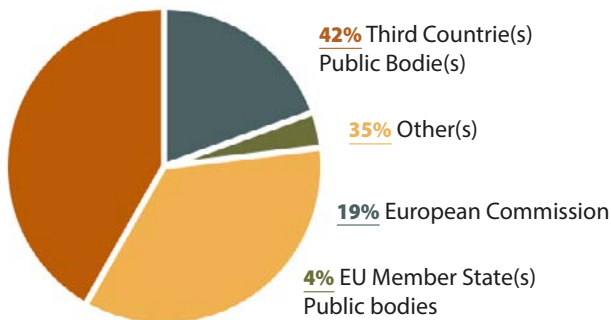
Externally, we’re focusing on how we work with partners. We want to ensure their perspectives are included in our strategy development and are creating a process for partner consultation. This will give us a deeper understanding of how they see the opportunities ahead, imminent threats, and the role of EU policy in the changes they seek in their countries. The most challenging thing about this process is that Fern is quite a fast-paced environment and there’s always information coming out of the EU that we want to respond to or need to collectively mobilise around. In contrast, our social justice work requires deep reflection and slow conversations about delicate and sensitive issues, and that’s quite tricky to make time for. However, I think that if we can do this well, then it will give us a much more holistic understanding of the underlying causes of the problems we’re trying to tackle, making our campaigns more effective, accountable and equitable.”



Financial results in 2021

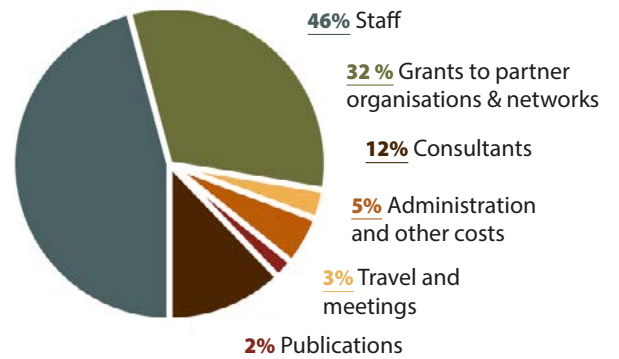
SOURCE OF INCOME

TOTAL INCOME
2,894,166 EUROS

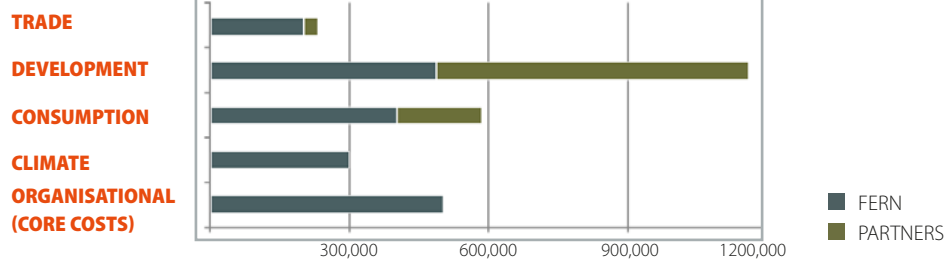


EXPENDITURES

TOTAL EXPENDITURES / CATEGORY
2,781,235 EUROS



EXPENDITURES BY CAMPAIGN



TOTAL EXPENDITURES / CAMPAIGN
2,781,235 EUROS

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In October 2021, we released *A Just Transition*, a discussion paper based on interviews with close-to-nature foresters. The paper looks at why intensive forestry is frequently neither fair nor sustainable and puts forward a new vision of a diverse and thriving forest-based sector where all actors receive their fair share.



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