

Brazil's environment minister quits amid illegal logging investigation

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Scientists say the Amazon has suffered losses at an accelerated rate since President Jair Bolsonaro took office

Brazil's environment minister has quit ahead of a criminal investigation into claims he obstructed a police inquiry into illegal logging in the Amazon.

Ricardo Salles is accused of vouching for the legal origin of a vast haul of timber worth approximately \$25m (£18m).

This is despite police evidence that it had been illegally logged.

Mr Salles is also facing a separate investigation into allegations that he was involved in the export of illegal timber to the US and Europe.

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"I understand that Brazil throughout this year and next, on the international stage and also nationally, needs to have a strong union of interests," Mr Salles said on Wednesday. "So that this can be done as smoothly as possible, I have submitted my resignation."

He has repeatedly defended record on protecting the rainforest, arguing that he had tried to find a balance between mining and agribusiness and the need to safeguard the Amazon.

In 2019, Mr Salles told the BBC: "Brazil has done an excellent job. We have 84% of the Amazon preserved as opposed to many other countries that criticise us, they have no forest anymore."

Conservationists have blamed the government of President Jair Bolsonaro for turning a blind eye to farmers and loggers clearing land in the Amazon, hastening deforestation.

Mr Salles will be replaced by the ministry's secretary for the Amazon, Joaquim Alvaro Pereira Leite.



media caption

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