

Climate rally to demand that Gordon Brown stops bungling with biofuels

Campaigners on Saturday's climate rally and march in central London are demanding that UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown reverses his Government's decision to force biofuels on motorists from next April. The march will stop at Downing Street to hand in a letter to Mr Brown that demands his government takes urgent action on climate change, including halting biofuel production.

The letter highlights that deforestation, forest and peat fires, and peat drainage and destruction are major contributors to global warming and the main reasons why Indonesia now ranks third amongst the world's worst greenhouse gas emitters. A recent scientific report showed that biodiesel from Indonesian Palm Oil could emit up to 36 times the CO₂ than fossil diesel.

Biofuels grown in Europe also have high climate impacts. Oilseed rape biodiesel that is 80% of the European market may produce up to 70% more emissions than fossil diesel.

Dr Andrew Boswell, from Biofuelwatch, an NGO that specialises in highlighting the dangers of massive biofuel expansion said 'UK policy under Gordon Brown is literally bungling with our futures. He is pushing for massive use of biofuels - that in turn can make climate change worse, and have disastrous consequences for the poor and disadvantaged. The UK government must drop its biofuels targets and demand that the EU freeze their targets too, so that there can be a full public policy debate on biofuels.'

Summary of biofuel demands in letter to Gordon Brown

- The UK government should abandon its target for 2.5% biofuels at the pump from April rising to 5% by 2100.
- The UK government should demand the EU freeze their targets under the EU Biofuels Directive and establish a moratorium under which there can be a full, evidence based, public policy debate on biofuels.
- The EU should ban importing biofuel raw materials from outside Europe
- The EU should ban production of biofuels from large scale monocultures within the EU until it can conclusively prove that these do not result in higher greenhouse gas emissions than conventional fossil-derived fuels especially through high nitrous oxide emissions from nitrate fertilisers.

Notes for editors: Background materials

1. 'The bog barons: Indonesia's carbon catastrophe', New Scientist, December 1st, <http://tinyurl.com/26qtzk> - palm oil biodiesel from Indonesian peat lands can emit 36 times as much CO₂ as fossil diesel'
2. Paul Crutzen study on nitrous oxide emissions from fertilizer used in biofuels, <http://tinyurl.com/39smo8> - rapeseed and maize biofuels are calculated to produce up to 70 per cent and 50 per cent more greenhouse gases respectively than fossil fuels

Contacts:

Dr Andrew Boswell, Director, biofuelwatch

E: andrewboswell@fastmail.co.uk T: 01603-613798 M: 07787127881

Notes for editors: Extract from letter to Gordon Brown

We demand that the UK government immediately reverse its decision to mandate 2.5% of biofuels at the pump from April 2008 under the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation. The RTFO will increase the demand for products like Palm Oil from Indonesia, the rapid increase in the cultivation of which has been a major factor in the accelerating deforestation of the region. Deforestation, forest and peat fires, and peat drainage and destruction are major contributors to global warming and the main reasons why Indonesia now ranks third amongst the world's worst greenhouse gas emitters, despite having relatively little industry. The RTFO will have the effect of speeding up rather than slowing down global warming. Worse than that, the deforestation that it will accelerate risks bringing about a complete collapse of tropical rain forest ecosystems which could involve a massive and very sudden release of CO₂ – a 'tipping point' or 'positive feedback' that might trigger a catastrophic warming episode. This is not to mention the humanitarian crisis that could result from the effect that the production of agrofuels is likely to have in pushing food commodity prices to record levels and thereby causing more hunger, amongst the world's poor.

We also demand that the UK government should demand the EU freeze their targets under the EU Biofuels Directive and establish a moratorium under which there can be a full, evidence based, public policy debate on biofuels. Not only should there be a moratorium on the production of biofuels from imported raw materials, within the EU (for the reasons given above) but also a moratorium on the production of biofuels from large scale monocultures within the EU – at least until it can be conclusively proved that these do not result in higher greenhouse gas emissions than conventional fossil-derived fuels especially through high nitrous oxide emissions from nitrate fertilisers.

George Monbiot,
Honorary President, Campaign against Climate Change

Phil Thornhill
National Coordinator, Campaign against Climate Change

Jonathan Neil
Secretary, Campaign against Climate Change

Peter Robinson,
Chair, Campaign against Climate Change

Jonathan Essex,
Steering committee member, Campaign against Climate Change

Andrew Boswell,
Director, Biofuelwatch and Norwich Campaign against Climate Change