

PRESS RELEASE

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Joint Press Release by Biofuelwatch, Ecological Internet and Rainforest Rescue

13th August 2007

Biofuel expansion threatens Europe's wildlife as set-asides are to be scrapped

Millions of farm birds could be left without enough food and breeding sites next spring if plans to scrap Europe's agricultural land set-aside targets for next year go ahead, warn environmental groups. Plans to set a zero set-aside targets from October this year have been announced by the EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Mariann Fischer-Boel, as a response to rising food prices. Those plans are to be ratified by ministers this autumn. Several studies confirm that set-asides have become a vital habitat for many of Europe's endangered birds and insects, and that farm birds have declined by nearly 50% on average since 1980. Over 5300 people have written to European politicians this month, asking for the plans to be dropped and supporting a moratorium on biofuel targets.

Glen Barry, Director of Ecological Internet explains: "Dramatic declines in insect, bird and wild flower populations show that many of Europe's ecosystems are under extreme stress from intensive agriculture and climate change. Our future depends on protecting healthy ecosystems. We need real cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, with massive cuts in energy use as well as truly sustainable renewable energy, such as wind and solar power. More intensively farmed monocultures cannot be part of the solution."

Almuth Ernsting from Biofuelwatch adds "There is no doubt that the expansion in biofuels is pushing up food prices. The European Union are committed to stopping biodiversity losses by 2010 but those plans will almost certainly make this impossible. Our birds and insects must not be sacrificed for biofuel expansion. We need a moratorium on EU biofuel targets and incentives now – and we need to keep our set asides until they can be replaced with better environmental safeguards."

Few environmental NGOs regard the current set-aside system, as being the ideal instrument for protecting farmland biodiversity, although it provides a safety net for many species. Many NGOs hope that a 'health check' of the Common Agricultural Policy in 2008 will lead to more targeted environmental safeguards. However, there are widespread concerns that sudden scrapping of all set-aside targets without any replacement or reform will devastate bird and insect populations.

According to Reinhard Behrend from Rainforest Rescue, Germany, "Biofuel expansion is already causing rainforest destruction and the displacement of large numbers of communities in the global South. At the same time, poor people are hit hardest by rising food prices whilst Europe burns more and more food in cars. The only logical solution is to suspend biofuel targets, whilst drastically reducing our overall fuel use."

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1. For further details of the organisations involved see
Biofuelwatch: www.biofuelwatch.org.uk
Ecological Internet: www.EcoEarth.Info/
Rainforest Rescue: www.regenwald.org.
2. An email action alert against the planned abolition of set-aside targets for 2008 and for a moratorium on EU biofuel targets has been signed by over 5300 individuals and can be found at http://www.climateark.org/alerts/send.asp?id=europe_biofuel_ecosystem and <http://www.regenwald.org/international/englisch/protestaktion.php?id=195>
3. A call for a Moratorium on EU biofuel targets and incentives, and on large-scale monocultures for bioenergy in Europe has been signed by 152 organisations from the global North and South. The text and the list of signatories can be found at <http://www.econexus.info/biofuels.html> .