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New report reveals biofuel industry lobbying against environmental protection

- For immediate release -

The campaigns group Biofuelwatch are today publishing a report which shows that leading biofuel companies throughout Europe are actively lobbying against basic environmental safeguards. The report analyses industry responses to a recent consultation about the European Biofuel Directive. The vast majority of companies want the government to actively promote a fast-growing biofuel market as a way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and thus the effects of climate change. Most of them, however, reject any regulations which would ensure that the biofuels sold in Europe actually are of benefit to the climate, rather than being grown at the expense of rainforests. Most companies also reject any regulations which would safeguard Europe's threatened wildlife and ensure that energy crops must be grown sustainably in Europe. One of the trade organisations quoted in the report as rejecting mandatory environmental safeguards in the near future is the Renewable Energy Association, which has 402 members, including most UK-based biofuel producers.

Those findings are published at the same time as a report by the Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (Efracom). Efracom call for increased government support of the biofuel industry.

Almuth Ernsting, author of the Biofuelwatch report states: "Biofuels sold in the UK might come from waste vegetable oil, which is good for the climate, or they might come from palm oil grown on land which has been cleared by burning virgin rain forest. We believe that governments must regulate the biofuels market in order to meet commitments under the International Convention on Biodiversity and the Climate Change Convention. We are disappointed that the majority of the biofuel industry rejects even basic environmental regulation which many see as a barrier to rapid market expansion."

Rainforest destruction currently accounts for about 25% of all global greenhouse gas emissions. In South America and south Asia, sugar cane, soya and palm oil cultivation are the main drivers of deforestation and deliberate fire raising. In Indonesia, thousands of forest and peat fires are currently burning, lit mainly by palm oil plantation owners. Scientists estimated that similar fires in Indonesia accounted for up to 40% of all global carbon emissions in 1998, and a similar figure could be reached this year.

The Biofuelwatch report shows that few of the biofuel industry responses submitted to the EU mention either deforestation or biodiversity losses as a concern, and none show any awareness of the major carbon emissions associated with palm oil, soy and sugar cane production.

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NOTES:

1. The full Biofuelwatch report "How biofuel companies are lobbying against basic environmental safeguards: An analysis of industry responses to the EU Biofuel Directive Consultation 2006" can be found here:

2. Biofuelwatch are an independent campaigns group for government regulation of the European biofuel market. The campaign aims to raise awareness of the dangers of unsustainable biofuels increasing the rate of tropical deforestation and leading to environmental destruction, particularly in the tropics. More information can be found on the campaign website www.biofuelwatch.org.uk
3. Several Indonesian organisations have warned that more rainforests are being destroyed across Borneo and Sumatra as a result of the European Biofuel Directive: http://www.eng.walhi.or.id/kampanye/hutan/konversi/060412_palmoilplantation/
4. Satellite images have shown that 75% of the hotspots of peat and forest fires on Borneo have been on land owned by plantations, which tend to grow palm oil:
5. <http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/docs/ref/publications/newsonline/33/indonesia.htm>