

For immediate release – 24th September 2007

Joint Press Release by Biofuelwatch and Econexus

UK and EU Biofuels policy in scientific doubt – the UK RTFO consultation must be re-opened, and the EU must abandon plans to abolish set-aside to plant biofuels in 2008

Environmental NGOs say that a new paper from Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen completely undermines the validity of UK and EU Biofuels policy.

The study suggests that emissions of a very powerful greenhouse gas – nitrous oxide – during the production of common biofuels such as rapeseed biodiesel and corn (maize) ethanol have been seriously underestimated. Nitrous oxide, or 'laughing gas' is emitted when nitrogen based fertilisers are used. If the new figures are taken into account then rapeseed biodiesel, for example, is up to 70% worse for the climate than fossil fuel diesel.

The NGOs call for policymakers in both the UK and EU take immediate action on the report:

- The UK Department for Transport have just closed a consultation on carbon reporting for the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO). Yet the research that some biofuels are calculated to produce more greenhouse gases respectively than fossil fuels brings the baseline figures in the RTFO proposed carbon accounting method into complete doubt.

As from April, consumers will not be able to buy fuel without added biofuel - the RTFO will force all fuels to contain 2.5% biofuel at the pump. The RTFO threatens to force biofuels on consumers that are blended from a variety of global sources depending on commodity market prices that may be more damaging to the climate than the fossil fuels they replace. **The NGOs call for the RTFO consultation to be re-opened.**

- The EU is expected shortly to fast-track proposals into law to effectively abolish set aside. This is to release up to 2.9m hectares of the 3.8m ha now under obligatory set-aside for growing more biofuels including rape seed. A very positive effect of set-aside has been that it provided habitats for species under pressure and increased farmland bio-diversity. Abolishing set-aside in one fair swoop without a replacement environmental management scheme will create a 'gap' and it will be wildlife who will suffer. For example, 80% linnets spend the winter on set-aside in East Anglia and will be placed under great pressure to survive. **The NGOs call for the EU environment ministers to abandon the proposed abolition of set-aside.**

Dr Andrew Boswell of Biofuelwatch said "There is already plenty of opportunity under the current RTFO rules for biofuels causing rainforest destruction, impoverishment and dispossession of local populations, and threatening food security to enter into UK fuel supplies – I've never seen such a leaky regulatory bucket. Now Paul Crutzen's paper places the calculations for European grown rape seed oil in complete doubt also, just as EU policy makers want a massive expansion of rape seed growing. The UK Department of Transport must re-open its consultation on the carbon reporting of biofuels and fully rework the life cycle analysis, including the effect of nitrogen, for all biofuels. Otherwise consumers will be forced from April to buy biofuels that promote climate change and social injustice."

Helena Paul of Econexus said "This paper shows that expanding biofuel production from oilseed rape and maize accelerates climate change. The EU wants to abolish set-aside to grow more oilseed rape for biodiesel, but it appears that this could increase, not reduce, greenhouse gas emissions. Abolishing set-aside for biofuel production as proposed would place many species under great pressure to survive without helping to avoid climate change. We need a moratorium on these EU biofuel targets and incentives now so there can be a proper debate on public policy."

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Further information:

Crutzen's paper

Overview and other links: <http://www.physorg.com/news109581631.html>

Paper in Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics, 'N₂O release from agro-biofuel production negates global warming reduction by replacing fossil fuels'

<http://www.atmos-chem-phys-discuss.net/7/11191/2007/acpd-7-11191-2007.pdf>

RTFO

Carbon and sustainability reporting within the renewable transport fuel obligation

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/closed/rtforeporting/>

Consultation closed : 13th September 2007

Set-aside abolition plans

"EU urged to halt set-aside to boost grain production", September 14th

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/eu/story/0,,2169082,00.html>

Woodlarks, skylarks, tree sparrows and yellowhammers are amongst birds to have benefited in the UK from set-aside because they can find food in winter and undisturbed nesting sites in spring. In East Anglia, 80 per cent of linnets spend the winter on set-aside, compared to one per cent on winter cereals. In France, the little bustard is dependent on set-aside, in Austria; set-aside is important to birds of prey in winter and a variety of farmland birds. Set-a-side has also improved water quality by keeping land next to watercourses free of fertilizers. In this way, it has partly compensated for environmental damage caused by agricultural intensification. More on the different wildlife / agricultural issues.

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/media/releases/details.asp?id=tcm:9-166473>

<http://www.birdlife.org/news/features/2006/06/biofuels.html>

http://www.birdlife.org/print.html?url=%2Fnews%2Fpr%2F2007%2F06%2Feurope_bird_declines.html

Notes:

1. For further details of the organisations involved see
Biofuelwatch: www.biofuelwatch.org.uk
Econexus: www.econexus.info
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> .