Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) is deeply problematic.

(sent as an email 26 September 2018)

Dear Secretary of State and Baroness Sugg,

At present, the EU and its member states have powers which would allow them to curb the growth of the aviation industry and its greenhouse gas emissions in Europe – even if they have so far, by and large, shied away from using them.

However, the aviation industry is trying to take those powers away entirely from the EU and EU members. To achieve this aim – and thus protect their future growth - they have made an innocuous-sounding appeal to the European Commission. They are calling on the Commission “to align the EU emissions trading scheme (EU ETS) with ICAO’s CORSIA initiative” (see: <http://atwonline.com/eco-aviation/associations-speak-out-risk-eu-ets-corsia-overlap>).

***CORSIA*** (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation) is a mechanism that is being established by ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation), which is a heavily industry-dominated specialist UN organisation. ICAO endorses “carbon neutral growth” for global aviation worldwide, and CORSIA is the mechanism to allow airlines to claim to achieve it. The two main planks are carbon offsets and “alternative aviation fuels”, which mainly means biofuels - resulting in a large growth in the use of palm oil.

The request by airlines to the European Commission is an attempt to bully member states into making a premature – and currently unlawful - choice about CORSIA. It would be unlawful because such a decision cannot be taken until after the Article 28 Review of the EU-ETS regulation. It would have to first be agreed by the European Council and Parliament

**CORSIA is a deeply flawed mechanism. We believe the government must seriously consider rejecting and pulling out of the CORSIA mechanism; and must urgently lodge a 'general difference' objection to the proposed alignment with the EU ETS.**

In June 2018, an Open Letter by 96 civil society organisations called on all members of the ICAO Council to reject the CORSIA mechanism:[biofuelwatch.org.uk/2018/icao-letter/](http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2018/icao-letter/" \t "_blank). The letter explains why **CORSIA’s plans are a boon for airlines, a disaster for the climate, and a threat to forests and communities.** Note in particular that that

·     Forest carbon offsets are expected to play a large role in future CORSIA offsets. In January this year, Virgin Atlantic In January 2018, Virgin Atlantic pulled out of a forest carbon offset project in Cambodia after high levels of deforestation as well as serious human rights abuses were revealed in the project area (see [fern.org/node/554](https://fern.org/node/554)). This is far from an isolated case;

·     **Palm oil is the only realistic feedstock** for large-scale aviation biofuels (see [biofuelwatch.org.uk/2017/aviation-biofuels/](http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2017/aviation-biofuels/)).

The EU, right now, includes aviation (i.e. flights within and leaving the EU) in its ***Emissions Trading System (EU-ETS***). Biofuelwatch, like other members of the Stay Grounded network ([stay-grounded.org/](http://stay-grounded.org/)) , believes that carbon offsetting is inherently problematic and can’t help to achieve the Paris Agreement goal of limiting warming to 1.5oC. However, the airlines want CORSIA to supersede EU-ETS, at least for aviation, and CORSIA is far worse than EU-ETS:

·     From 2020, EU-ETS won’t allow for any carbon credits/offsets from projects outside the EU;

·     EU-ETS will allow for some carbon credits to be generated from the Land Use and Forestry sector within the EU, but the scope for those will be limited;

·     Although EU-ETS classifies biofuels, including for aviation, as ‘zero carbon’, provided that they meet the EU’s (weak) sustainability and greenhouse as standards, this hasn’t led to any large-scale use of aviation biofuels. Crucially, the EU is set to rule to that the use of palm oil for biofuels cannot go above 2019-levels and must end entirely by 2030. So, creating a big new demand for palm oil biofuels for aviation isn’t compatible with EU rules;

·     CORSIA on the other hand, promises what would basically be a free-for-all for carbon offsets and biofuels;

·     ICAO, which decides on the CORSIA rules, is complete non-transparent, doesn’t even allow for NGO observers and is heavily dominated by industry.

CORSIA is a deeply flawed mechanism.

We urge the government to seriously consider **rejecting and pulling out of the CORSIA mechanism**;

NB If the government does not agree to pull out of CORSIA at this stage – before the final rules are formally agreed - then it is vital to state that it is not able to make a decision about participating in CORSIA yet and to **lodge a “general difference”** (i.e. a reservation) before 1 December 2018 in order to protect the EU’s right to legislate on aviation. If CORSIA were accepted without member states filing a difference, EU governments and the EU as a whole would be open to legal challenges against any current and future policies aimed at regulating aviation, not only under EU-ETS but also through taxes, or any other economic measures.

Committing to CORSIA now would in fact be unlawful because it would amount to a back-door revision of EU-ETS without proper approval.   The request by airlines is an attempt to bully member states into making a premature – and currently unlawful - choice about CORSIA. It would be unlawful because such a decision cannot be taken until after the Article 28 Review of the EU-ETS regulation. It would have to first be agreed by the European Council and Parliament.  Under no circumstances should governments or the EU as a whole commit to CORSIA now, in the absence of public and parliamentary scrutiny. This must include full scrutiny of ICAO documents which are not currently in the public domain;

CORSIA wants to roll out its baseline Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) programme by 2019. As explained above, we considerCORSIA’s plans to be unacceptable. However, the Commission intends to allow this to be done through a delegated act and there is no need or reason at all for changing EU-ETS rules and giving in to the aviation industry’s demands.

Thank you for considering our urgent request. We look forward to hearing what action you decide to take.

Yours sincerely

Duncan Law

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*Read Tommy Sheppard MP on* [*why burning wood on an industrial scale is daft*](https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/energy/house/house-magazine/91110/tommy-sheppard-burning-wood-industrial-scale-daft)

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