

Open letter to UK government and local authorities and other relevant organisations

Agrofuels for UK power plants are not ‘green energy’

The undersigned organisations are deeply concerned about proposals to build a series of co-generation power plants in the UK which would run on vegetable oil agrofuels. Those would be subsidised by the UK government through the Renewables Obligation. The plans include a first plant with a 56,000 litre per day capacity to be built in Beckton, London, followed by seven similar plants. A media report states that the company, Blue NG, plans up to 43 vegetable oil power plants across the UK, which could amount to 2.4 million litres per day (tinyurl.com/6f7fqv).

The UK must not follow the disastrous German example of using agrofuels on a large scale in CHP plants and must instead support a moratorium on agrofuels from large-scale monocultures, both for transport and for heat and power (see www.econexus.info/biofuels.html)

In Germany, few providers of agrofuel CHP plants can afford any feedstock other than palm oil. There is no reason why the same would not happen in the UK. Peat expert Professor Siegert of Munich University has described the climate impact of Germany’s policy: “We were able to prove that the making of these plantations and the burning of the rain forests and peat areas emits many thousands of times as much CO₂ as we then are able to prevent by using palm oil. And that is a disastrous balance for the climate.” Vegetable oil for German CHP plants is grown on an estimated 100,000 hectares in South-east Asia (palm oil), and 43,000 hectares in Europe (rapeseed). Palm oil expansion is linked to the displacement of communities, increased land conflicts, human rights abuses, deforestation, and a loss of food sovereignty and food security. In Indonesia, for example, many people can no longer afford vegetable oil for cooking and are risking ill health or even death by using waste vegetable oil for food, whilst Europe burns Indonesian palm oil as biodiesel and in power stations. Creating a similar market in the UK in the name of ‘green energy’ is unacceptable and will exacerbate the social and environmental crises caused by agrofuels.

Using European feedstock is no answer: Europe’s use of rapeseed oil for bioenergy is one of the main reasons behind rising palm oil prices, as confirmed in a 2006 study by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation [tinyurl.com/2o9bab]. Furthermore, rapeseed oil has been shown to be linked to up to 70% more greenhouse gas emissions than fossil fuel oil due to nitrous oxide emissions from fertiliser use (tinyurl.com/2elcyc), and rapeseed expansion in Europe, much of it on formerly set-aside land, is a major threat to biodiversity.

‘Sustainability’ claims are meaningless:

In the case of Blue NG, the company is promising to source vegetable oil ‘sustainably’. They say that they are ‘likely’ to only source feedstock from the UK and EU in the ‘foreseeable future’, but they have not committed themselves to this and their planning application specifically mentions likely imports, including from Brazil, Malaysia and India. If the plants are built, they will be able to use any type of feedstock from anywhere – whether rapeseed, soya, palm oil or jatropha - and to benefit from government support.

The company’s sustainability ‘commitments’ do not include any commitment to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions at all, nor any commitment to consider impacts on food security – instead there is a commitment to only using existing arable land, suggesting a likely direct competition with food. There is a general statement that people and communities will be ‘considered’, but no commitment to respect land rights, impacts of agrochemicals on people, working conditions or in general to avoid adverse social impacts. Indirect impacts are ignored and there is no indication as to who will verify the company’s claims. Furthermore, the company has failed to consult with local residents and is proceeding despite growing opposition and concerns within the local community, including from people concerned about additional local air pollution in an area which already has one of the highest rates of asthma in the UK.

Conclusions

Europe’s demand for vegetable oil is already unsustainable and must be reduced, not increased by using it for power plants or for biodiesel. There is no evidence that large-scale truly ‘sustainable’ sourcing of agrofuels is possible.

The UK government must abandon all incentives and subsidies for industrial agrofuels, including the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation and the inclusion of agrofuels into the Renewables Obligation.

Efficient renewable decentralised energy can and should play an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It must be based on truly sustainable renewable energy, not on industrial agrofuels, which will exacerbate climate change and have serious social and environmental impacts.

Signatures of organisations

- ADEV - Actions pour le Développement et la Vie, Democratic Republic of Congo
- Apoyo al Fortalecimiento de la Sociedad Civil (AFOSI), Paraguay
- Argentina Red de Acción en Plaguicidas de América Latina, Argentina
- Asamblea Nacional Ambiental, Ecuador
- Asociación Amigos de los Parques Nacionales (AAPN), Argentina
- Asociación Amigos del Perú Amazónico, Germany
- Asociación Amics de Palanques (ADP), Spain
- Asociación Civil de Educación y Desarrollo, Venezuela
- Asociacion civil vida-ong VIDA, Argentina
- Asociación Cultural "LA SERROTA", Spain
- Asociación de Estudiantes de Derecho (ASEDE), Spain
- Asociación de Monitores Medioambientales "Almijara", Spain
- Asociación Ecologistas Extremadura, Spain
- Asociacion Francia America Latina, Comite de Niza, France
- Asociación Globalizate, Spain
- Asociación Paisaje, Ecología y Género, Spain
- Asociación para la Conservación del Patrimonio de Guadix y Comarca, Spain
- Asociación San Francisco de Asís, Argentina
- Base Investigaciones Sociales, Paraguay
- Biofuelwatch, UK
- Bios, Argentina
- Bosquihermanos, Asturias, Spain
- BUND LV Sachsen e.V., Germany
- Campaña "No te comas el Mundo", Catalonia, Spain
- Centro de Derechos Humanos "Fray Francisco de Vitoria O.P.", Mexico
- Cheltenham Environment Forum, UK
- Climate Outreach and Information Network, UK
- Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz, Colombia
- Comite Oscar Romero, Valladolid, Spain
- Comite Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, Colombia
- guscastro@laneta.apc.org
- Comunidad indígena de Boca del Monte, Mexico
- Confederacion Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indigenas y Negras, Ecuador
- COP/Centre for Orangutan Protection, Indonesia
- Corporate Europe Observatory, Netherlands
- Critical Ecology / Institute for Applied Cultural Research, Germany
- DECA Equipo Pueblo, Mexico
- Down to Earth: the International Campaign for Ecological Justice in Indonesia, UK
- Ecologistas en Acción, Spain
- Ecological Internet, U.S.
- Ecologistas en accio, Marina Baixa, Pais Valencia, Spain
- Econexus, UK
- Educacion para la paz, Asociacion civil, Chiapas, Mexico
- Enginyeria Sense Fronteres, Catalonia, Spain
- Espacio Bristol-Colombia, UK
- Estamos en Peligro, Chile
- fair-fish association, Switzerland
- Familia Dominica, Puerto Rico
- Food not Fuel, London, UK
- Forest Peoples Programme, UK
- FUNDACIÓN Cerro Verde, Ecuador
- Fundacion Ecuatoriana de Investigacion y Manejo Ambiental, Ecuador
- Fundación Prodeci, Ecuador
- Foundation Pro Papua, Netherlands
- Friends of the Earth Sierra Leone
- FUNDECOL, Ecuador
- Gaia Foundation, UK
- Gesellschaft zur Rettung der Delphine, e.V., Germany
- Grupo de Reflexion Rural, Argentina
- Grupo Semillas, Colombia
- Instituto de Regeneración Ecológica, Ecuador
- Latin American Network against Monoculture Tree Plantations

- Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste, Chiapas, Mexico
- Movimiento Madre Tierra, Honduras
- Movimiento Mexicano de Afectados por las Presas y en Defensa de los Ríos, Mexico
- Nature Alert, UK
- NOAH, Friends of the Earth Denmark
- Nord-Süd-Forum Fürstenfeldbruck, Germany
- Núcleo de Geografía Viva A.C., Venezuela
- One Tonners, UK
- Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras, OFRANEH, Honduras
- Otros Mundos, AC, Chiapas, México
- Plataforma de Solidaridad con Chiapas, Oaxaca y Guatemala de Madrid, Spain
- PRO BAHN, Germany
- Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos, Venezuela
- Proyecto Cultura y Solidaridad, Spain
- RAPAL Uruguay
- Rapalmira (RAP-AL), Colombia
- Red Mexicana de Acción frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC), Mexico
- Rettet den Regenwald e.V., Germany
- Robin Wood, Germany
- Save our Borneo, Indonesia
- Sociedad Ecologica Regional, Argentina
- Sumatran Orangutan Society, UK
- Tierra Viva, Bolivia,
- Timberwatch Coalition, South Africa
- Univerdidad Técnica Latinoamericana (UTLA), El Salvador
- Vision 21, UK
- Watch Indonesia!, Germany
- Westfälische Gesellschaft für Artenschutz e. V. (WGA), Germany
- World Rainforest Movement
- Xarquia: alternatives - Ecologistes en acció, Spain
- Xarxa de l'Observatori del Deute en la Globalització, Catalonia, Spain

Prominent Individuals:

Mayer Hillman, UK
 Mark Lynas, UK