

Press Release

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Government to face angry opposition to new biofuels law

Demonstration against the RTFO, April 15th

Campaigners furious at the government's disregard of countless warnings from scientists, UN officials and development professionals about the environmental damage and humanitarian crisis caused by biofuels have vowed to take their protest to Gordon Brown. Hundreds are expected to assemble at:

Downing Street, from 6.00 pm, Tuesday 15th April

Phil Thornhill of Campaign against Climate Change and Andrew Boswell of Biofuelwatch, in a joint statement, said "The RTFO or "Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation" will mandate 2.5% biofuels at British fuel pumps from April 15th, and thereby hugely increase UK consumption of biofuels. The government is demonstrating a perverse obstinacy in ploughing ahead with this despite the overwhelming scientific evidence that far from helping in the struggle to control climate change, biofuels will accelerate climate change, and are a major cause of an emerging global food crisis that is creating starvation and food riots in several countries."

On what they have labelled "**April Biofools Day**" demonstrators will also be active across the country on April 15th. The Minister for Transport will be targeted for protest, as well as the Prime Minister.

Demonstrations and Photo Opportunities, April 15th:

London, 6.00pm. Demonstration, photo and TV opportunity, with "burning tree" display and speeches outside Downing Street 6.00pm. Speakers include: Andrew Boswell, biofuelwatch; Ronnie Hall, Global Forest Coalition; Kenneth Richter, Friends of the Earth; Pete Riley, campaign director of GM Freeze; and Phil Thornhill, Campaign against Climate Change.

>> *There will be a Press briefing and **photo opportunity** earlier at 1.00pm* outside Department for Transport, Horseferry Road. Interviews with climate and biofuel campaigners.

Other protests in Aberdeen, Cheltenham, Edinburgh, Manchester and elsewhere – these will include demonstrations outside the constituency offices of Ruth Kelly, Transport Minister in Bolton. See <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/actionsapr08.php>, <http://www.campaigncc.org/biofuels.shtml>

Contacts for all events to arrange interviews and filming

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Notes for editors, background to the protests:

Despite its insipid name, the Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation (RTFO) is dangerous new legislation being introduced on April 15th that forces biofuels to be blended into the UK fuel supply. It is the policy driven by wider EU plans to mandate massive amounts of biofuels into petrol and diesel across Europe. Environmentalists have warned for years that these EU targets will wreak havoc on the climate and food supplies, and eco-systems and people in the global South.

These concerns are now echoed by senior scientists and policy makers. Here is an inventory of just some of the statements since the beginning of the year.

- *January 14th* – a UK Royal Society report warned that biofuels could do more damage than fossil fuels by accelerating rainforest destruction. (<http://tinyurl.com/6obfkk>)
- *January 15th* – one of the EU biofuel policy architects, EU Environment Commissioner, Stavros Dimas, tells the BBC admitted that 'environment problems caused by biofuels are bigger than we thought', and suggests that targets might have to be put on hold. (<http://tinyurl.com/6d9oko>)
- *January 20th* – a group of MPs, the Environmental Audit Committee publishes a report 'Are Biofuels Sustainable?', that calls for moratoriums of UK and EU targets. (<http://tinyurl.com/356t9v>)
- *February 8th* – peer reviewed scientific studies show that converting land for biofuel plantations creates a biofuel 'carbon debt'. It would take 840 years of biofuel production to repay the carbon debt in destroying peatland rainforest. Even for agricultural land reclaimed from US conservation land (similar to set-aside in UK), the figure is decades. (<http://tinyurl.com/3bbq5j>)
- *February 26th* - the UN's World Food Programme warned that due to rising food prices, it is short of \$0.5billion just to meet existing food aid deliveries. Its advisers estimate that the rush to biofuels is 30% of the cause of these rising food prices. (<http://tinyurl.com/69bqqz>) Meanwhile, Europe plans for a 12-fold EU increase of wheat based ethanol refineries. Last year's UK wheat surplus was around 0.75 million tonnes, and ministers here plan an expansion in ethanol refineries specifically using wheat that will take the UK into a 3 million tonnes deficit by 2010. (<http://tinyurl.com/5j4t7x>)
- *March 8th* – the UK Government Chief Scientist, John Beddington, warns that the rush towards biofuels is threatening world food production and the lives of billions of people. (<http://tinyurl.com/35h5l4>)
- *March 24th* – Referring to the RTFO, Prof Bob Watson, UK Environment ministry DEFRA Chief Scientist, says "it would obviously be insane if we had a policy to try and reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the use of biofuels that's actually leading to an increase in the greenhouse gases from biofuels." (<http://tinyurl.com/6hhnej>)

April 1st, UK Transport minister and RTFO minister, Jim Fitzpatrick gives the thin excuse to Parliament that the Government can not suspend the introduction of the RTFO because it would involve tiresome debates in both Houses of Parliament. (<http://tinyurl.com/66cb2r>)