

New EU sustainability criteria ‘a fig leaf’ for failed biofuel policy, say campaigners

Wednesday 7 May. For immediate release. New European Union proposals for ‘sustainable biofuels’ fail to address the fundamental problems of encouraging the growth of crops for fuel use, environmental and social justice campaigners said today.

“The draft criteria published today prove that the EU is nowhere near developing any credible mechanism to prevent disastrous impacts from biofuels on communities, food security, biodiversity and climate” says Almuth Ernsting of Biofuelwatch. **“Biofuels must now be taken out of the Fuel Quality Directive, otherwise a policy aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions will have the opposite effect.”** [1]

“The EU may keep on trying to greenwash large scale agrofuel production, but there is no possible sustainable production for industrial agrofuels which invariably imply land concentration, rural people displacement, and loss of biodiversity, agrodiversity and local knowledge” comments Ana Filipini of World Rainforest Movement

The new EU proposals emerge from an ‘ad hoc working group’, composed of civil servants from EU member states and the European Commission, which was set up at the end of February to propose ‘sustainability criteria’ for biofuels. These would be applied to both the EU Renewables Directive, which includes a 10 per cent target for the use of biofuels in transport by 2020, and the Fuel Quality Directive, which also incentivises biofuel use.

These EU policies have been widely criticised for fuelling the rise of global food prices, and ignoring concerns that biofuel production displaces other agriculture - thereby encouraging deforestation that accelerates climate change.

“If the criteria do not adequately address indirect impacts, they will not be worth the paper they are written on. Since the ad hoc working group has failed to make a serious effort to prevent negative impacts from agrofuels, the burden lies on the European Parliament and the Member States to do the right thing: drop the target” says Helena Paul of Econexus.

With EU Commissioners meeting to discuss the world food crisis on Wednesday, the campaigners are calling for a moratorium on incentives to switch from food to fuel crops.

“The EU’s agrofuel policies are putting additional pressure on global food prices” says Oscar Reyes of the Transnational Institute. **“If the European Commission is serious about tackling the crisis, it should start by imposing an immediate moratorium on its incentives for further agrofuel production.”** [2]

Over 200 organisations have signed a call for an EU moratorium on agrofuels from large-scale monocultures. For the full text of the moratorium call, see: <http://www.econexus.info/biofuels.html>, and for further background information on sustainability criteria, see Paving the Way for Agrofuels: EU policy, sustainability criteria, and climate calculations, http://www.tni.org/detail_pub.phtml?know_id=202

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Notes for the editor:

[1] "Use of U.S. Croplands for Biofuels Increases Greenhouse Gases Through Emissions from Land-Use Change"
Timothy Searchinger et al, 7th February 2008, Science, <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/1151861>

"Land clearing and the biofuel carbon debt", Joseph Fargione et al, 7th February 2008, Science,
<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/1152747v1>

[2] Rising food prices: Policy options and World Bank response, April 2008,
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/NEWS/Resources/risingfoodprices_backgroundnote_apr08.pdf

Rising Food Prices: What should be done, Joachim von Braun, IFPRI Policy Brief, April 2008,
<http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/bp/bp001.asp#read>

FAO Food Outlook November 2007, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/ah876e/ah876e00.html>

OECD, Richard Doornbosch and Ron Steenblik, "Biofuels: Is the Cure Worse Than the Disease?", September 2007,
<http://media.ft.com/cms/fb8b5078-5fdb-11dc-b0fe-0000779fd2ac.pdf>