

Environmentalists warn that EU biofuel proposals put rainforests, the climate and communities at risk

A European consultation on biofuels closes today, with nearly 5,000 respondents warning that current proposals fail to comply with an EU Summit decision that biofuel targets should be conditional on guaranteeing that biofuels must come from sustainable sources.

The European Commission have proposed a small number of environmental criteria for deciding whether biofuels are sustainable. This means that biofuels would be classed as sustainable even if they come from plantations from which local people have been evicted. In countries like Colombia and Indonesia, human rights abuses at the hands of plantation companies and paramilitaries are widespread.

Andrew Boswell says: "In the last month, we have heard from the chair of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Sixth session) that 5 million indigenous people in one part of Borneo alone are likely to be displaced by biofuel plantations. We have also heard of thousands of families who have been violently evicted from their land by paramilitaries in Colombia who are helping palm oil companies clear land to produce biofuels, mostly for export. The EU commission is culpable, as it knowingly forced through this aggressive biofuels target without considering sustainability first, and with a blind eye to social and human rights issues. "

European proposals also seek to ignore the wider impacts of biofuel production. Europe's biofuel policy is pushing up the price of soya, palm oil and other commodities, which are already linked to large-scale destruction of rainforests, peatlands and traditional farmlands. NASA scientists have shown that, in the Amazon, the rate of rainforest destruction is directly linked to the price of soya. Almuth Ernsting, also of Biofuelwatch says: "The European Commission want to do nothing about the wider impacts of biofuel production other than 'monitor' them. They are looking for tiny greenhouse gas savings from displacing a small proportion of fossil fuels whilst risking the large-scale destruction of rainforests and peatlands on which all of us depend for a stable climate. This policy will be a disaster for ecosystems, for local communities particularly in the global South, and for the global climate".

Earlier this month, seven organisations wrote to all MEPs to ask for an end to biofuel targets and support until Europe could guarantee that all biofuels come from sustainable sources. They expressed their serious concern that the EU has not encouraged organisation in the global South to participate in the consultation, even though people in Asia, Latin America and Africa will be affected most directly by Europe's biofuel policy.

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REFERENCES AND NOTES:

1. Biofuelwatch is a UK-based campaign group against the use of biofuels from unsustainable sources. The website is www.biofuelwatch.org.uk
2. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues warned in May that 5 million indigenous people in West Kalimantan, Indonesia were likely to be displaced by biofuel production. See:
http://www.checkbiotech.org/green_News_Biofuels.aspx?infold=14672

[<http://tinyurl.com/2rxgv6>]

FULL REPORT:

http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/6session_crp6.doc

[<http://tinyurl.com/2j96om>]

3. Human rights abuses and evictions in Colombia, linked to biofuel expansion, were reported by the Guardian on 5th June (http://environment.guardian.co.uk/energy/story/0,,2095349,00.html#article_continue [<http://tinyurl.com/2bye9d>]) and have been confirmed by several NGOs, including Christian Aid and Peace Brigades International.
4. For details of the link between the price of soya and Amazon destruction, see <http://news.mongabay.com/2006/0919-amazon.html> [<http://tinyurl.com/2zzep5>]
5. A copy of the Open Letter sent to MEPs can be found at <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/biofuelwatch/message/656> [<http://tinyurl.com/2acz44>].