

Press release: Biofuelwatch and Watch Indonesia! warn against plans for UK's first vegetable oil power plant

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Biofuelwatch and Watch Indonesia! [1] warn that plans by the company Blue NG to build a vegetable oil power plant in Beckton, London, to be followed by seven other plants across the UK could set a dangerous precedent with serious implications for climate change, food security, biodiversity and communities – including the community in Beckton, who may be at risk of air pollution from the CHP plant [2].

Both organisations express disappointment over Greenpeace's decision to support the scheme.

Deepak Rughani of Biofuelwatch states "We fully support decentralised energy but not the use of virgin vegetable oil as an energy source. There is clear evidence that all agrofuels from vegetable oil currently available are linked to higher greenhouse gas emissions than fossil fuel oil or gas [3]. In view of the current food price crisis which threatening the lives of millions of people, burning food for energy is irresponsible".

Marianne Klute of Watch Indonesia! adds: "I live in Germany where about 1,800 CHP plants burn vegetable oil. The vast majority of them burn palm oil because they cannot afford any other feedstock. The impact on Indonesian forests, people and the climate has been disastrous: Europe's energy policy is the main reason for palm oil expansion in Indonesia, resulting in large-scale deforestation and thus carbon emissions, human rights abuses, land conflicts and increased hunger. We strongly urge the UK not follow the German example."

Earlier this month, the UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, confirmed that using rapeseed oil for agrofuels is directly linked to forest destruction in Indonesia.[4]

Civil societies and movements have issued a "Civil Society statement on the World Food Emergency" which has been signed by over 730 organisations and individuals worldwide [5]. It calls for an "immediate halt to the development of land for producing industrial agrofuels for cars, planes and energy production in power stations". Furthermore, over 200 organisations from North and South have signed an EU agrofuel moratorium call [6]. Both Biofuelwatch and Watch Indonesia! support each of these calls.

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Notes:

1. Biofuelwatch is a UK campaign against the use of bioenergy from unsustainable sources – see www.biofuelwatch.org.uk . Watch Indonesia! is a NGO working on Democracy, Human Rights and Environment in Indonesia and East Timor. www.watchindonesia.org
2. The Biofuelwatch objection to the planning application by Blue NG can be found here: http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/files/beckton_letter.pdf For a detailed factsheet about the proposal, see http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/files/thames_gateway_biodiesel_project.pdf . Biofuelwatch has requested permission to give verbal evidence at the Newham planning consultation hearing on 4th June, 7pm. Biofuelwatch has strongly objected to a number of false allegations which Blue NG against the organisations, including an allegations that the objection has been withdrawn, which is untrue.
3. See for example <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/1151861> and <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/1152747v1>
4. See <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=42247> Blue NG claim that their plans will save CO2 emissions, but they ignore all indirect emissions from land use change (ecosystem destruction) and also all emissions of nitrous oxide, which is up to 300 times as powerful a greenhouse gas as CO2.
5. See www.viacampesina.org/main/en/images/stories/pdf/22-05-2008_csofoodemergency-en.pdf
6. See : www.econexus.info/biofuels.html