

New report calls for “reality check” on biofuels

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The rush for “biofuels” is already causing serious damage, according to a new report by 11 civil society organisations from around the world.

Agrofuels – towards a reality check in nine key areas sets out considerable evidence that the spread of what are more accurately called “agrofuels” – liquid fuels produced from biomass grown in large-scale monocultures, mostly in the global south – is compromising biodiversity and fuelling human rights violations.

The report finds that agrofuels threaten to greatly accelerate climate change through the destruction of ecosystems and carbon sinks on which we depend for a stable climate. The rush to agrofuels encourages intensive, industrial agriculture at the expense of sustainable food production.

“Monoculture plantations have been doing serious damage around the world for decades, but agrofuels represent a further intensification of the process, endangering what remains of global forest cover and climate. They also threaten the food sovereignty, cultural, human and land rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. The destructive impact of these agrofuels is already severe, while the pros and cons are being debated and certification initiatives are being devised. It is likely that by the time any real analysis has been completed, further irreversible damage will have been done to biodiversity and the climate” says Helena Paul of Econexus.

“Claims are being made that biofuels will mitigate climate change, yet the reality is very different. The rapid expansion of agrofuel monocultures is speeding up the destruction of peatlands, tropical forests and other ecosystems, leading to massive greenhouse gas emissions. In a worst case scenario, further deforestation for agrofuels could push the Amazon forest into rapid die-back, releasing up to 120 billion tonnes of carbon and disrupting rainfall patterns over much of the northern hemisphere” says Almuth Ernsting of Biofuelwatch.

The authors highlight how agrofuels are being used as a new promotional vehicle for GM technologies, in particular through the development of “second generation” crops. Agrofuel expansion also threatens to displace indigenous peoples from their lands.

“The whole agrofuel process is going far too fast, pushed by corporations and governments before any controls are in place. Massive investment in infrastructure is already taking place around the world that will set us on a path from which it will be difficult to escape,” says Oscar Reyes of the Transnational Institute.

A call for a moratorium on EU incentives for agrofuels, EU imports of agrofuels and EU agroenergy monocultures was launched in Brussels last week by the same 11 organisations. It has already attracted the support of over 100 organisations worldwide.

Agrofuels – towards a reality check in nine key areas is co-published by: EcoNexus, Biofuelwatch, Carbon Trade Watch (Transnational Institute), Corporate Europe Observatory, Ecologistas en Acción, Ecoropa, Grupo de Reflexión Rural, Munlochy Vigil, NOAH (Friends of the Earth Denmark), Rettet Den Regenwald, Watch Indonesia.

To view an executive summary or download the whole report, see:

http://www.tni.org/detail_pub.phtml?know_id=188

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Notes:

1. The call for an immediate moratorium on EU incentives for agrofuels, EU imports of agrofuels and EU agroenergy monocultures can be found at: <http://www.econexus.info/biofuels.html>

2. The term “agrofuels” is preferred to “biofuels”. As Via Campesina, amongst others, has pointed out, the prefix “bio” is used “to subtly imply that the energy in question comes from ‘life’ in general. This is illegitimate and manipulative. We need to find a term in every language that describes the situation more accurately, a term like agrofuel. This term refers specifically to energy created from plant products grown through agriculture.”