

Public consultation for the Biofuel issues in the new legislation on the promotion of renewable energy.

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General remarks

We acknowledge that the EC has proposed a binding 20% target for the overall share of Renewable Energy in 2020.

We find it unfortunate though, that the EC has opted for a binding 10% target for the share of biofuels in petrol and diesel in each member state in 2020.

We find that the first effort must be directed towards genuine energy savings and an increased energy efficiency. There is an obvious need to minimise the absolute volume of transport work.ⁱ

Concerning biofuels we are worried that the EC member states – as well as many other countries in the world – choose a course of development that is

- not sustainable, but rather has serious drawbacks directly as well as indirectly
- not going to deliver the energy surplus which is the rationale behind the idea.

Therefore we do not agree with the extended use of biofuels and we do not believe that the use of a biofuel sustainability system is desirable at all.ⁱⁱ

We fear that it could in fact make the undesirable situation that is currently happening all over the world (virtually a “biofuels hype”) even more drastic and harmful for the following reasons:

- by adding sustainability criteria people (consumers) are misled to believe that road transportation then is sustainable while the producers will be very happy to advertise that their biofuels offer a “green” solution
- by promoting “sustainable biofuels” the EU is encouraging producers in the agro-industry, the oil companies, the car-industry as well as in trade and investment businesses to extend the production, trade and use of biofuels
- this will all lead to a growing demand for biofuels rather than the necessary measures to reduce road transportation and measures to make road transportation more energy efficient
- there is currently no overall knowledge regarding what the increased use of biofuels will lead to in relation to nature, food-production, social conditions, water use or even climate effects

It seems that the EU is so obsessed by the thought of bringing down the greenhouse gas emissions from road transportation – without introducing any restrictions to this form of transportation – that the Commission is willing to accept a number of unknown environmental and social risks to achieve even the smallest reduction in CO₂-emissions.

Predict and provide

When politics all over the world are promoting more road transportation, the demand for fuels will be ever-growing. Trying to meet this demand by exchanging fossil fuels with “sustainable” biofuels will inevitably lead to competition between food for people and food for cars – and the threats under the current world order are overwhelming: that the cars (and the car-owners) will be the winners and poor people the losers.

It is very problematic and short-sighted that the Commission is investing large sums to fund the building of roads rather than investing in railways, when at the same time EU is expressing concerns about reducing the CO₂-emissions and bringing more of the transportation of goods to rail.ⁱⁱⁱ It is also very problematic that the Commission is not committed to legally demand cars to be much more energy-efficient, as the potential to bring down CO₂-emissions this way is so large, if the Commission would accept some limitations to top-speed, extra equipment and size of the cars (downsizing). And it is very problematic that the EU growth agenda is paramount to the sustainability agenda – and that the Commission is therefore not trying to develop politics and planning that can bring about a reduction in the need for transportation.

Predict and prevent

The growth in transportation in volume – by private car, aviation, long haul of goods by truck, ship or rail must be addressed and reversed. *Stopping the Great Food Swap*^{iv} is just one evidence of the huge potential for simple energy savings in the transportation sector. The potential of modal shift has been studied and broadly documented to be able to deliver similar large reductions in energy consumption.

Legislation needed

What is needed is to implement the necessary legislation at European and national level to force a change to happen. (Taxes on vehicles and fuel, road pricing and congestion charges, mandatory emission standards etc. on one side and support schemes for public transportation on the other side.)

Energy balance and GHG balance

We are not convinced that the energy balance nor the greenhouse gas balance will/can be positive in favour of biofuels. There are certainly productions which are extremely harmful. So there is need for more research and more holistic research - in these balances as well as the biodiversity aspects and in the social impacts.

Topsoil

Destruction of nature and soil can not be avoided – even if sustainability criteria were taken into account because there is currently no monitoring system, which involves all the different issues. When taking all part of the plants away from the soils, they are depleted for organic matter with erosion and loss of productivity as a result. And when growing plants for biofuels – even if so-called “sustainably” on already existing farmland – there is no way to assure that no more land will be taken into production for producing food.

Need for imports

Being an organisation that works in close collaboration with environmental organisations all over the world, we are very worried about the binding targets of 10% biofuels in the transport sector by 2020, as this will be very difficult to meet with purely European biofuels. Furthermore, we find it very

problematic that the EU is so concerned to make sure that there must be no discrimination between domestic production and imports, which could act as barriers to trade. This indicates that EU is largely obliged to meet the (problematic) targets by importing biofuels. This is further underlined by the EAA report on biofuels, from which it is evident that the European potential for bio-energy use is quite limited.^v

Go for alternatives

Therefore we urge the EU Commission to invest more time in the alternatives in the transportation sector and to roll back the process of biofuels use at least until much more knowledge of the consequences is at hand – rather than promoting the use by covering (in a “sustainability” smoke screen) the unfavourable result this can bring about.

Moratorium

We therefore support the demand for a moratorium to biofuels from large-scale monocultures as well as trade in biofuels.

@ 1 How should a biofuel sustainability system be designed?

As stated above we do not support the use of a biofuel sustainability system is desirable at all, but we just want to make this comment: If biofuels **are** chosen as a (major) source of energy for the transport sector in the EU, it is absolutely essential that a thorough set of sustainability criteria are applied.

The criteria must encompass economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Acknowledging the vast difference between rich and poor countries and acknowledging the that biomass is by nature a very local resource that should also be treated as such, it must be clear that the problem for the hyper inflated transport sector in rich countries like the EU should not be solved by importing biomass from poor countries.^{vi}

This is even more important as rainforests, peatlands and other vulnerable ecosystems are being destroyed to make way for plantations of palm oil trees etc. We suspect that any control regime set up by the EU would be bypassed too easily. If not directly then indirectly by displacing other (previous) crops into vulnerable areas.

This leads to the criteria we find indispensable:

No import of biomass to or export of biomass from the EU.

- *The feedstock for biofuel is a local or regional resource that should not be transported across Europe just because of market considerations.*
- *Transport of biomass/biofuels between regions and certainly between continents will decrease the doubtful energy gain in biofuels.*

Imports and exports should only be permitted between *regions* where local people have been fully consulted and are in agreement and if human rights are respected. No country or region in the world

should permanently exploit land in other countries or regions as a consequence of net imports of agricultural products, biomass or biofuels. Particularly imports and exports of biomass and biofuels between continents are unacceptable. The EU should therefore ban import and exports of biomass and biofuels to/from EU.

So the sentence “It should avoid any discrimination” must be deleted. It expresses a valuation of market concerns over environment. The hierarchy of values must be reconsidered in a way that environmental, biodiversity and social values come on top.

To ban imports and exports must be seen as a sustainability concern, not as a barrier to trade.

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ⁱ It is recognized in the EEA report “Transport and environment: on the way to a new common transport policy”

“However, as the extent of important environmental impacts such as climate change, noise and landscape fragmentation are closely linked to transport volumes, addressing them still requires the management of transport demand. The overall success of the new policy therefore still hinges on limiting (growth in) transport volumes.”

http://reports.eea.europa.eu/eea_report_2007_1/en/eea_report_1_2007.pdf

ⁱⁱ Jos Delbeke, Director in Directorate C: Climate Change & Air, DG Environment, has expressed doubts whether it would be possible at all to produce bioethanol in large enough quantities in a sustainable manner. Danish daily newspaper Information, Friday 15 June 2007, p. 8.

ⁱⁱⁱ See <http://www.bankwatch.org/billions/>

^{iv} Report by Dr. Caroline Lucas MEP <http://www.carolinelucasmep.org.uk/publications/greatfoodswap.html>

^v How much bioenergy can Europe produce without harming the environment? EEA Report No 7/2006

^{vi} We support the observations from Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia) that the Consultation Paper has serious flaws and biases. http://ec.europa.eu/energy/res/consultation/doc/2007_06_04_biofuels/non_og/foe_malaysia_en.pdf (p. 1)