

Annex III: No “sustainability” in the Renewables Directive

Under the Renewables Directive, as approved by the Parliament in December 2008, agrofuels will be required to meet “sustainability standards”. In reality this will be a very short list of criteria which will not include social impacts, basic human rights standards, or many of the environmental impacts. There is also no monitoring or any meaningful verification scheme as ‘verification’ will be based on self-reporting by companies, or on the existence of bilateral or multilateral agreements, or voluntary certification schemes.

Emissions from changes in land use (eg clearing forest for agriculture) will not be included, although this may change after 2012¹.

During the debate, it was very clear that some governments did not want to get rid of the target for agrofuels. Germany, France and Spain were among the strong supporters for the mandatory 10% target. According to MEP Claude Turmes, rapporteur on the Renewables Directive, this was “clearly the result of the pressure of the national farmers organisations and the ethanol industries,” adding: “Very important lobbies were French farmers, German farmers, and sugar companies like Südzucker who are heavily organised and well networked both in the Parliament, the Commission and in the Member States”².

The Brazilian ethanol lobby also played an active role, especially following the Industry Committee in the European Parliament vote in September 2008. UNICA took out full-page advertisements in the Brussels weekly paper European Voice ahead of key votes in July and in September, promoting their claim that a 10% target would “help fight climate change” by arguing that sugarcane captured more carbon than pasture land - overlooking scientific evidence on the quantity of carbon dioxide stored and released from the soil, and not looking at indirect impacts. The advertisement also claimed that sugarcane production had no impact on the Amazon, despite the strong evidence that it is displacing other types of agriculture and cattle ranching into the Amazon basin.

According to Turmes, their lobbying has most likely influenced key MEPs within the Socialist and Liberal groups, which in turn influenced their parties³. Several MEPs were invited to attend a UNICA tour in Brazil. Commissioner Piebalgs and an entire EU delegation attended a one day tour of a UNICA plant near Sao Paulo before the International Biofuels Conference in Brazil, November 2008⁴.

Adverse impacts of agrofuels

Large scale production and use of agrofuels do not mitigate, but increase Greenhouse Gas Emissions. A closer look at agrofuels reveals a devastating picture: a false solution to climate change alongside a wave of new problems.¹

- * competition with food for agricultural resources. The expansion of agrofuel crops was one of the main causes of rising food prices in 2008, which in turn threatened the food security and food sovereignty of some of the world’s poorest communities;

- * increasing the pressure on land-use, resulting in an increased deforestation rate;

- * the expansion of devastating huge mono-crop plantations, involving intensive use of pesticides and fertilisers, increasing soil erosion and creating water pollution, which threatens biodiversity and causes other environmental hazards;

- * the danger of genetically modified contamination in the case of GM crops and GM trees.

- * land rights are put under threat when, as is often the case, big agribusiness moves in to develop large-scale monoculture agrofuel crops. The rights of small farmers and indigenous peoples are often ignored, resulting in families being evicted from their land. Many more face health problems as a result of the intensive farming methods and poor working conditions.

- * increased climate change emissions, if counted from well-to wheel and including emissions due to Indirect Land Use Change, the NOx emitted and the energy involved in the production of mechanised crops.

¹ Agrofuels. Towards a reality check in nine key areas, CEO et al, June 2007, <http://www.tni.org/reports/ctw/agrofuels.pdf>

1 Biomass and biofuels in the Renewable Energy Directive, by Almuth Ernsting, Biofuelwatch, January 2009, <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/docs/RenewableEnergyDirective.pdf>

2 Personal communication with MEP Claude Turmes. January 2009.

3 Personal communication with MEP Claude Turmes, January 2009.

4 Personal communication with UNICA, November 2008