

Moratorium for Unsustainable Biofuel Now

By International Network for Sustainable Energy (INFORSE), 30/12 2008

Background

December 9, 2008, the EU countries agreed a renewable energy directive with sustainability criteria for the use of biofuel in transport, but the existing directive for renewable energy in transport (dir. 2003/30/EC) sets target for an increasing use of biofuels and other renewables in transport until 2010 without sustainability requirements. The effect of this old directive is an increasing use of biofuels with little sustainability concerns. Contributing to the sustainability problem is the trend away from pure biofuel used in special vehicles and instead blend a smaller amount of biofuels into all vehicle fuel. This increases the push for the cheapest available biofuels irrespective of the source. Too often the source is unsustainable production, primarily in tropical countries, where much of the production creates large environmental and social problems.

It is a contradiction to promote biofuel to increase sustainability of transport and at the same time not require that the production is sustainable nor ensure that it gives a substantial reduction of greenhouse gas emissions compared with fossil fuels.

The EU is finalising the “Fuel Quality Directive”, where it is the intention to require maximum and decreasing lifecycle CO₂ emissions (2% lower in 2015, 4% lower in 2018, and 6% lower in 2020), which can be met by mixing biofuels into the fuel. This will give an additional push for biofuels blended into transport fuels, and there are uncertainties regarding how to evaluate sustainability of the biofuels. While the directive can give a problematic push for biofuels, it will also give a badly needed push for oil extraction and refining with less greenhouse gas emissions and a push against the very polluting extraction of heavy oils and oil from tar-sands.

Countries Should Set Sustainability Requirements in 2009 and Report

To address the well-known sustainability problems of biofuels, we call on the EU countries to:

- Set sustainability requirements for biofuels in 2009, at least similar to the ones in the recently adopted renewable energy directive,
- Stop import of biofuels from countries, where the biofuel production is not sustainable, environmentally or socially,
- Promote other forms of renewable energy in transport, such as renewable-energy based electricity.
- Report publicly on sources of biofuels used in the country, the sustainability and greenhouse gas emissions of the biofuel, and the agricultural area that the production covers

EU Must Promote Sustainable Biofuel use Now

We call on the EU in 2009 to:

- Demand that national reporting regarding use of renewable energy in transport following directive 2003/30/EC must include sources of the biofuels used in the country, their sustainability, their greenhouse gas emissions, and the agricultural land their production covers.
- Include in reports and communications on biofuel use the sustainability of the biofuel used in the EU, as well as the greenhouse gas emissions in the production, and the agricultural land used.
- Develop clear sustainability requirements for biofuel including problems associated with indirect land-use change.

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