

Protests in the UK against palm oil imports
(Photo: Biofuelwatch)



DTE

May 2010

**Down to Earth
International Campaign
for Ecological Justice
in Indonesia**

*This update is also available in
Bahasa Indonesia*

See <http://dte.gn.apc.org/cag10.pdf>
or <http://dte.gn.apc.org/cag10.htm>

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Agrofuels policies and campaigns at EU level - an update

With the Renewable Energy Directive (RED; Directive 2009/28/EC) the EU has set the target that 10% of all road transport fuel has to come from renewable sources by 2020.

The RED sustainability criteria include a greenhouse gas saving threshold of 35% compared to fossil fuels (50% after 2017) and ban agrofuels sourced from high biodiversity areas and land with high carbon stocks.

By June 2010 all member states have to submit National Action Plans (NAP) to the EC providing information on how they will ensure that 10% of all transport fuel comes from renewable resources by 2020.

There is a danger that this target might be mainly covered by agrofuels. However, the UK Government, for example, announced in April 2010 that the UK NAP "will not include any new commitments to increase transport-related biofuel use in the UK."(1)

An EC report on the impact of agrofuels (March 2010), which highlights the urgency of considering indirect land use change (ILUC), will hopefully have an impact on other EU member states' decisions on agrofuel targets.(2)

ILUC is where land is cleared to make way for crops that have themselves been displaced by agrofuel crops.

The EC has commissioned the International Food Policy Research Institute to examine the impact of indirect land use change.(3) The March report is the first of four studies which will result in the EU proposals on how to deal with ILUC by the end of the year.

The first study, which examines the impact of the EU agrofuels target in the transport sector, shows that anything above 5.6% of transport fuels from agrofuels will rapidly increase greenhouse gas emissions and "erode the environmental sustainability of biofuels".

NGOs are critical of the fact that the Commission used the level of 5.6% as a basis for examining the impacts of ILUC, because at this low percentage, agrofuels don't look environmentally damaging. It is therefore hoped that following studies will be based on more realistic percentages. (4)

A major independent and scientific study about the environmental effects of agrofuels was published in April - a timely report in the current context of NAPs development and the ILUC proposal by the EC. The study, which involved 75 scientists from 21 countries, says "In light of the adverse environmental consequences, potential displacement or competition with food crops, and difficulty of meeting these goals without large-scale land conversion, current mandates and targets for liquid biofuels should be reconsidered." (5) Hopefully it will be difficult for policy makers to ignore such scientific evidence on negative impacts of agrofuels.

Campaigns

FERN, Friends of the Earth, Oxfam, Transport & Environment et al published an analysis of EU biofuels policy with recommendations for policy makers and industry in November 2009. Recommendations particularly highlight the significance of ILUC.(6)

Just over 2 weeks before the first report on ILUC impacts was published by the EC (see above), a group of environmental organisations filed a legal action against the European Commission as around 140 documents on possible negative impacts of agrofuels were being withheld from the public. It was assumed that crucial information was being withheld by the EC until it was no longer relevant for the development of national policies. The incident further shows that a few EU policy makers seem to actually have concerns about the impacts of EU agrofuel policies and would rather not share them with the public.(7)

Notes:

- (1) <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/216723/2a3c81c8deb6de42d65f3bcfda9cb437.htm>
- (2) The EC has to come up with proposals on how to deal with ILUC by the end of this year.
- (3) See report on <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/analysis/chief-economist/>
- (4) http://www.fern.org/sites/fern.org/files/FW%20148%20April%202010_0.pdf
- (5) <http://cip.cornell.edu/biofuels/> via <http://www.transportenvironment.org/News/2009/4/75-scientists-call-for-end-to-biofuels-targets/>
- (6) http://www.foeeurope.org/agrofuels/documents/Biofuels_Handle_With_Care_Nov09.pdf
- (7) <http://www.fern.org/sites/fern.org/files/FW%20147%20March%202010.pdf>

Further Reading:

- http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/energy/renewable_energy/en0009_en.htm
- www.fern.org
- www.biofuelwatch.co.uk
- www.transportenvironment.org
- Palm oil vs forests: <http://dte.gn.apc.org/84ain.htm>
- Palm oil in the UK: <http://dte.gn.apc.org/84dpa.htm>

Right: a woman gathers oil palm fruit in a plantation in Riau province, Sumatra.

In Indonesia, oil palm plantations are associated with poverty, human rights abuses, the takeover of indigenous territory, forest and peatland destruction, biodiversity collapse and high levels of greenhouse gas emissions.



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