

EU Forest Watch

Informing NGOs, MEPs, Member States, the European Commission and the media

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EU Council reaches a troubling conclusion

On 21 October 2009, EU Member States presented their final position for the Copenhagen summit.¹ The Conclusions reiterate the EU commitment to reduce emissions by 30 per cent from 1990 levels by 2020, provided other developed countries make comparable reductions. It must be remembered though that many of these “reductions” will presently come from carbon offset schemes.

The Council prefers to pay for other countries to reduce their deforestation through REDD which it describes as proceeding in three phases. The first phase is for preparatory work, the second phase “could involve measures related to forest governance, including biodiversity conservation, such as land tenure reforms and forest law enforcement accommodated through public funds,”

and a third phase where action is paid for through carbon trading. The wording used to describe the second phase is positive as it reflects the growing understanding of the need for governance to be improved if forest loss is to be halted.

Less encouraging is the Council’s insistence on the third phase for REDD being based on carbon trading, ignoring growing evidence that this will not work for forests. Also, there is only a watery commitment to recognising rights of indigenous peoples as a precondition for REDD: “REDD+ activities must take into account and avoid creating conflicts with practices of indigenous peoples and local communities.”

Another area of concern is the Council’s approach to accounting for emissions from land use, in particular with regards

to forests. The Council admits that accounting for forests and land use within the EU has not been accurate and that future measurements are likely to be equally shaky. But instead of calling for an end to the carbon accounting folly, the Council Conclusions endorse the current approach of the climate negotiations of adjusting accounts in advance.² This is when countries are allowed to estimate their future emissions from the forest sector (even if they are planned to increase) and use that as a business-as-usual scenario from which to measure future reductions.

1. Council Conclusions: www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/envir/110634.pdf

2. See LULUCF Follies. <http://www.climate-network.org/eco/barcelona-2009-ecos/Eco1.pdf>

Flawed bioenergy policies will fail EU forests

During the Environment Council in October 2009, Spain presented a note about forest protection, biodiversity conservation and the fight against forest fires,¹ supported by six other Member States and the European Commission. The note underlines the key role of forests in climate regulation and states that the Renewable Energy Directive will lead to an increase in forest management and contribute to renewable energy production, which should be implemented alongside better protection of the environment.

Yet in the same week, an article was published in Science² stating that the Kyoto

Protocol accounting rules contain a far-reaching flaw: by treating all bioenergy as carbon neutral, they fail to count for either CO₂ emitted from smokestacks or changes in emissions from land use when biomass for energy is harvested or grown. This error can create perverse incentives to clear land and displace the world’s natural forests.³

At the urgent request of Member States, the European Commission announced that it would present a green paper on forest protection at the EU level in early 2010. In addition, the Commission will soon issue a report on a sustainability scheme for biomass linked to the EU’s

Renewable Energy Directive. Widely expected to contain binding biomass criteria, the Commission currently only considers presenting non-binding recommendations. This will further increase the risk that Member States continue underaccounting for emissions from forest management, including for biomass energy use.

1. <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st14/st14563.en09.pdf>

2. Searchinger, T., et al., “Fixing a critical climate accounting error,” *Science*, vol. 326.

3. Wise, M., et al., “Implications of limiting CO₂ concentrations for land use and energy,” *Science*, vol. 324, 1183-86.



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NEWS IN BRIEF

The UNEP Resource Panel's new report, "Assessing biofuels," (www.unep.fr/scp/rpanel/pdf/Assessing_Biofuels_Full_Report.pdf) provides an overview of key problems and perspectives concerning production and use of agrofuels. One of its key findings is that, as global demand for agrofuel increases, so will the demand for land on which to produce agrofuel crops. If first-generation agrofuel technology is used to meet worldwide transport fuel demand, the report estimates that by 2030 between eight and 36 per cent of current cropland would be needed to meet only ten per cent of demand. It concludes that global land-use for production of fuel crops is driven by volume of agrofuel production targets, rather than appropriate land-use planning.

New research by Friends of the Earth, "Failing governance, avoiding responsibilities," (www.milieudefensie.nl/globalisering/publicaties/#at) examines the effects of the EU's increasing use of agrofuels and finds that Europe's growing demand for palm oil drives deforestation, illegal activities and social conflict in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Among the investigation's conclusions is that local communities' rights to their customary lands are often ignored and, despite international commitments, the land allocated instead to oil palm companies. Land conflicts stand only to rise as the expansion of the plantations increases. The report follows the World Bank's September 2009 announcement of the suspension of funding to palm oil projects (http://news.mongabay.com/2009/0909-palm_oil_ifc.html).

350 reasons why carbon trading won't work. On 24 October 2009, thousands joined 350 simultaneous global events to sound the alarm that corporate-driven carbon trading schemes impede genuine efforts to address the climate crisis. The initiative included a list of "350 reasons carbon trading won't work" (www.350reasons.org/350reasons_readonline.pdf), which outlines problems with carbon-derivatives and offsets.

CAR VPA negotiations calendar ambitious

On 13 October 2009, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the EU launched negotiations with the aim of signing a FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) agreement within the next 12 months. Voluntary partnership agreements (VPAs) aspire to embark on a joint path of action to improve forest governance as this is seen as the backbone to reducing illegal deforestation. As improvements in forest governance largely depend on how local civil society is engaged in the process, negotiations aim to provide the space for participation.

Unfortunately, if unchanged, the ambitious speed of the negotiations could diminish the resulting agreement. The local NGO platform is concerned that they will not have time to prepare

meaningful contributions and their position will be harmed by the present restriction to only have two delegates in meetings. Given the broad spectrum of topics to be discussed, they fear that their representatives' contributions will be hampered. Allowing time and resources for capacity building and sufficient exchange of information between civil society groups in Bangui and their counterparts in the field will be decisive in ensuring national ownership of the VPA and a successful outcome of the process.

These concerns have been raised with both the EU and the government of CAR and it is hoped that proceedings will now move forward at a more considered pace, allowing CAR to join Ghana and the Republic of Congo as countries that have signed successful VPAs.

CDM to open doors to large scale plantations

A change in a rule under the 2002 Marrakesh Accord - the 'rulebook' of the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) - that has so far kept the majority of large scale tree plantations from applying for CDM registration looks set to be changed. The amendment adopted at the CDM Executive Board's 50th meeting from 13-16 October 2009 allows for projects on land that were forested on or after 1 January 1990 (the previous cut-off date), as long as they can demonstrate that "in absence of the project activity,[the land] will be converted to non-forested land through final harvesting."

According to REDD Monitor, this proposal, introduced by Brazil, would be a disaster for forests and the climate and create a massive subsidy for industrial tree plantations.¹

Despite the Executive Board's adoption of this proposal it is still possible for the parties to the Kyoto Protocol to reject the change when it is presented

at the upcoming climate conference in Copenhagen in December 2009. With the social and environmental problems of plantations abundantly clear and strong global interest in the outcomes of the Copenhagen meeting, many hope that this recent attempt to change the CDM rulebook in favour of the plantations industry instead of the climate can be stopped.

1. <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2009/04/06/why-brazil-is-interested-in-forests-in-exhaustion/>

Forest Agenda

11 November: Sustainability of European Bioenergy policy. European Parliament, Brussels.

17 November: NGO bio-energy meeting. Brussels.

19-20 November: EU FLEGT projects coordination meeting. Brussels.