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Climate campaign newsletter

Issue 15 - September 2008

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WHAT'S NEW

GREEN EYE

It's crunch time for the climate package of EU legislation, which was proposed by the European Commission in January 2008 to enable the EU to 'achieve its objectives in the fight against climate change'. EU legislators are under pressure from various industry lobbies to weaken almost all of the legislative proposals under or related to the climate package.

Whether from utility firms, car manufacturers or other energy-intensive sectors, the subterranean presence of the industry lobby can be felt throughout negotiations on EU climate policies. Though far from alone in pushing this agenda, German legislators (both government representatives and MEPs) are to the fore in the efforts to undermine this legislation and, ultimately, the EU's greenhouse gas emissions reduction target for 2020.

Car emissions rules get a boost

Despite an intense lobby from the car industry, there is still hope that the EU might agree to meaningful rules for reducing CO2 emissions from cars. The EP environment committee, which is the lead committee on the legislative proposal, voted on 25 September to reject a proposal that would have seriously watered down the original European Commission proposal.

The Greens welcomed the result of the environment committee vote, which would maintain the Commission proposal for a binding CO2 emissions target for the EU car fleet in 2012 (130 g/km with an extra 10 g/km reduction to come from 'additional measures'). It also maintains the level of penalties for non-compliance with the target (rising to €95 in 2015), which would ensure car manufacturers have an incentive to reduce the emissions of the cars they produce.

While some loopholes - such as exemptions for specialist providers or extra allowances for 'eco-innovations' - remain, the MEPs also supported a binding target for 2020(95 g/km), providing legal certainty for the industry.

The EP will now try to negotiate a compromise with the Council. However, with German Chancellor Merkel and French President Sarkozy already having agreed on even weaker rules (in line with car makers' demands), it is far from certain that the end legislation will deliver the necessary reductions in CO2 emissions from cars, as highlighted in a recent study.

Renewable energy law taking shape

Proposed EU rules for realising a binding target of 20% of EU energy from renewables by 2020 are starting to take shape. Following a strong vote in the EP industry and energy (ITRE) Committee on 11 September, EP rapporteur and Green MEP Claude Turmes is hoping to negotiate a compromise with the Council before the year end.

The ITRE Committee, which is the lead committee, voted to strengthen the Commission proposal in a number of areas. Interim targets and a penalty system will help ensure that progress towards the overall target is taken right away. The report would also ensure that renewables are given priority dispatch access to national grids, while Member States would be obliged to promote renewables in the building sector.

On the use of renewables in transport, the Committee failed to support the Green proposal to abandon a binding 10% target for 2020, despite ever-increasing evidence on the dangers of agro-fuels. A number of improvements were introduced however: a major review (including of the 10% target for renewables in transport) in 2014; a low interim target of 5% for 2015, coupled with a minimum threshold for renewables from non-food/feed fuels (i.e. electricity or hydrogen from renewables and non-food/feed biomass) of 20% in 2015 and 40% in 2020; and stronger sustainability criteria (such as on greenhouse gas saving and indirect land use).

There is strong opposition to the proposal in Council from a number of Member States - led by the UK, Italy and Sweden - and the French Presidency is not making negotiations easy. However, the rapporteur is hopeful of securing an agreement, which would keep the climate package on track.

Emissions reduction target under pressure

The European Commission's main emissions reduction legislation under the climate package, on an emissions trading scheme (ETS) and effort-sharing for emissions reductions from non-ETS sectors, is coming under pressure both in the European Parliament and in the Council. There are proposals in the Council and the EP to increase the proportion of emissions reductions that could be realised through external offsetting (such as through CDM/JI offsets).

This would mean that a large proportion of the EU's emissions reductions could be externally offset, completely undermining the domestic cuts of 25-40% by 2020, which the UN IPCC has claimed are necessary to give a 50% chance of limiting warming to under 2 degrees.

On 22 September, a chaotic vote in the industry (ITRE) committee on the proposed effort-sharing legislation created confusion about the overall targets and also supported an increase in the proportion of external offsets to an annual 4% of 2005 emissions, which would mean external offsets could amount to up to 80% of the overall EU emissions reduction effort.

NGOs criticised the opinion report on the next phase of the emissions trading scheme (post-2012), adopted by the ITRE Committee on 11 September, which called into question the automatic increase of the EU's emissions target to 30% and increased the level of external offsets proposed by the Commission. However, the Greens welcomed a rejection of free allocation of carbon permits in the long term.

The key votes in the lead environment committee are scheduled to take place on 7 October, with Green MEP Satu Hassi the rapporteur for the proposal on effort-sharing in the non-ETS sectors. These will hopefully set out a clearer and stronger position from the EP on climate protection ahead of negotiations with the Council.

Emissions trading scheme dogged by over-allocation...again

An investigation carried out by the Guardian newspaper and campaign group Sandbag, revealed that UK companies received an over-allocation of carbon permits for the second phase of the EU's Emissions Trading System from 2008-12. This has raised fears that the second phase could be undermined in the same manner as the first phase, leading to windfall profits for polluting companies.

The investigation suggests that up to 9m extra annual permits have been allocated to 200 companies across almost all sectors of the UK, including some of the biggest polluters. All this despite strong evidence that a properly functioning ETS, with a meaningful cap and auctioning, is not only a vital tool for tackling climate change but will not have a negative impact on consumers.

European citizens want more action on climate change

A new Eurobarometer survey has shown that citizens across Europe view tackling climate change is a major priority and that they feel not enough is being done to tackle the problem. Over 30,000 people took part in the survey, with a majority responding that that neither industry nor politicians (at national government or EU level) are taking sufficient action on climate change. The survey was commissioned by the European Commission and European Parliament jointly.

ROUND-UP

Arctic ice in decline

Arctic ice reached its second lowest level since records began this summer according to the National Snow and Ice Data Center and the European Space Agency's Envisat. Mark Serreze, a senior scientist at the NSIDC, said that it is now likely that the long-term trend is accelerating, contributing to the warming cycle of positive feedback, and that the Arctic could be ice-free by the summer of 2030.

Climate models confirmed

New studies have confirmed the accuracy of current climate models and the accuracy of the 'hockey stick' graph showing Northern Hemisphere temperature rises over the past 1000 years.

Emissions trading launched in US

The first cap and trade system in the US aimed at reducing CO2 emissions from power plants was launched on Thursday, 25 September, by a group of ten states in the northeast.

New evidence of rising methane emissions in Siberia

New research in the Arctic north of Siberia suggests that climate-damaging methane emissions are rising faster than previously expected.

Proposed nuclear reactors at Mochovce subjected to assessment

The controversial completion of two nuclear reactors at Mochovce will eventually be subjected to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), according to the Slovak government. The EIA will have to be carried out before the operation permit is delivered. While this will not mean an immediate halt in construction, campaigners and Greens are now working to get legal support for blocking construction until the EIA has been carried out.

WHAT'S ON

Greens/EFA

9-10/10 Greens/EFA external group meeting in Paris, including a session on the EU energy/climate package (10.00-13.30 on 10/10); live streaming on www.greens-efa-org

12/11 Conference on the impact of climate change on health and social services

EU

7/10 European Parliament environment committee votes on emissions trading, effort-sharing for non-ETS

sectors and carbon capture and storage

9-10/10 Council of energy and transport ministers

15-16/10 European Council

18/10 Council of environment ministers

5/11 Commission communication on energy security

WHAT'S NEW

The Stop Climate Change campaign is undergoing some changes. A new campaign website will be launched in mid-October to include, among other things, a blog aimed at giving an insider view into how the EU actually passes key laws aimed at tackling climate change: the wreckers, greenwashers and the deal-makers.

Recommended

Publication



Call for tenders: Greens/EFA Consultation widget

18.10.2026

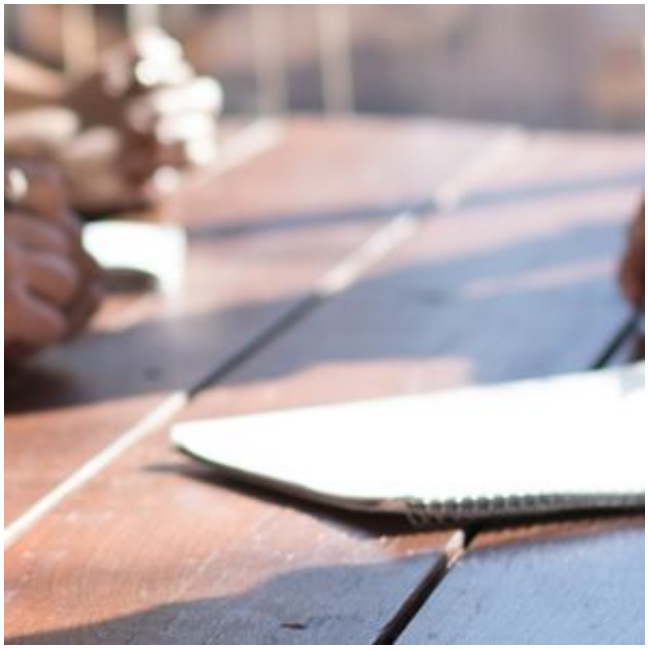
Publication



Call for tenders: The Greens/EFA CRM Software

08.10.2026

Publication



Human Resources Management System

02.10.2025

Publication



Heads of national delegations in the GREENS/EFA Group

11.03.2025

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