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Climate campaign newsletter

Issue 16 - November 2008

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GREEN EYE

The EU's climate package of legislation is in its endgame phase. Following key votes in the European Parliament this month, negotiations are getting underway with the Council with a view to reaching an agreement on the legislation by mid-December in time for the international climate negotiations at Poznan. However, there is real concern that, in its haste to rush through an agreement, the French presidency will settle for legislation that is based on the lowest common denominator.

Emissions reduction legislation: Pandora's box opened

The European Parliament's environment (ENVI) committee stood strong in the face of attempts by polluting industries to derail the proposed EU emissions reduction legislation. While the 7 October votes on the proposals for a post-2013 emissions trading scheme (ETS) and effort-sharing for emissions reductions from non-ETS sectors were not as strong as the Greens would have liked, the outcome could have been much worse.

MEPs voted in favour of automatically increasing the EU's emissions reduction target to 30%, following an international agreement. They supported Green rapporteur Satu Hassi's proposal to limit the amount of external offsets (such as the Kyoto Protocol CDM or JI) that can be used to achieve the emissions reductions from non-ETS sectors. They also supported the principle of full auctioning of carbon permits under the ETS, while resisting demands to seriously increase the use of external offsets to meet ETS targets.

The proposals are coming under intense pressure from different member states in the Council however. At the European summit on 15-16 October, different member states tried to use the financial crisis as an excuse to postpone the climate package. In an attempt to appease these states, the French presidency appeared to open the door to their demands for exemptions, raising fears that the end result could be a lowest common denominator agreement.

Italy has jumped on board with an alliance of central and eastern European states and is calling for fundamental changes to the proposals, an approach that NGOs have strongly criticised. This is in spite of a new study from the IEA, which confirms that the risk of 'carbon leakage' is minimal.

This opposition to the emissions reductions legislation, combined with German attempts to undermine the proposed EU rules on car emissions and other question marks over the proposed renewables legislation, will set the scene for a difficult month of final negotiations.

'Capturing' and burying carbon gets EU support

The European Parliament's environment (ENVI) committee voted on proposals setting out a regulatory framework for the commercial application of carbon capture and storage technology (CCS) on 7 October. MEPs voted in favour of a Green proposal for a CO2 emission performance standard on all new fossil fuels power stations. However, the standard would only be introduced in 2015 and not 2012, as the Greens proposed. In addition, the limit has been set at 500g CO2/kWh, rather than 350g CO2/kWh, as proposed by the Greens, which would have excluded all new coal power stations without CCS.

In the ENVI vote on the post-2013 Emissions Trading Scheme, MEPs voted to give firms implementing

CCS projects free emissions permits. So, not only would the captured emissions not be counted under the ETS, the firms would be given extra emissions permits. MEPs proposed a reserve of up to 500 million allowances for CCS projects (equivalent to up to €10 billion depending on the carbon price). Greens and environmental NGOs strongly criticised this proposal, which will now form part of the negotiations with the Council on the EU's climate package.

The EU's faltering Kyoto commitment

The EU15 (the 15 'old' EU member states) is making some progress towards meeting its greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitment under the Kyoto Protocol but most of the effort will be realised by external offsetting. A new report from the European Environment Agency (EEA) has shown the progress towards emissions targets in the different EU countries.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, the EU committed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions 8% by 2012 (compared to 1990 levels). The EU15 has reduced its emissions by 2.7% to date. Based on the current measures being implemented, the EEA expects this to rise to 3.6% by 2010. Most of the extra effort towards achieving the target is likely to be accounted for by the purchase of external offsets for emissions through the 'flexibility mechanisms' of the Kyoto Protocol (CDM and JI) and by creative accounting for reforestation and forest management in the EU. Given the high proportion of external offsetting (CDM/JI) already included in the ETS, the actual overall emissions reductions achieved within the EU 15 might well turn out to be minimal.

Bail-outs for polluting carmakers

Not only are polluting European car manufacturers lobbying intensively to undermine proposed EU rules on reducing car emissions, they are also lobbying to get public funds to invest in technology they should have invested in ten years ago. Not to be outdone by French and UK plans to pump public funds into carmakers, EU leaders also agreed to an EU level bail-out for the auto industry at their summit on 15-16 October. The details of the €40 billion package are being worked out between the industry and the Commission.

First steps to tackling illegal logging

The European

Commission finally published its long-awaited and delayed proposals for combating illegal logging on 17 October. The package comprises a legislative proposal to reduce the risk of illegal timber products entering the EU market and general proposals for tackling tropical deforestation. *The Greens criticised the proposals for allowing third countries to define the legality of timber products but welcomed the concerns raised by the Commission about the use of 'sink' credits as part of emissions trading.*

ROUND-UP

Leading climate scientists call for deeper emissions cuts

A new study from the UK Met Office's Hadley Centre called for much deeper greenhouse gas emissions cuts. The study suggests that only by cutting emissions by at least 3% per year from 2010 will we have a realistic chance of limiting global warming to 2°C and preventing dangerous climate change.

A separate study by renowned NASA climate scientist James Hansen and nine other scientists has claimed that the level of greenhouse gas concentration needs to be reduced to a much lower level than was previously claimed to avoid a 2°C warming.

These calls were made against the backdrop of other new studies showing that climate change is accelerating faster than expected, with record high temperatures in the Arctic, a sharp rise in methane levels and the discovery of much higher concentrations of a potent greenhouse gas.

Preparations underway for key climate talks

Environment ministers from over thirty countries met in Warsaw on 12 October to prepare for the key UNFCCC meeting (COP14) at Poznan in December. The COP14 meeting will set out a clear work plan

for the issues that need to be agreed in the first six months of 2009, with a view to realising an international climate agreement at the COP15 meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009. The Danish government is optimistic about the prospects for reaching an agreement at Copenhagen.

Growing calls for investment in green technologies

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) published a major study highlighting the urgent need for a massive increase in investment into green technologies. Following on from a UN study last month, which outlined the major potential for job creation in green technologies, the UNEP study argues that the financial, food and fuel crises have served to underline the need for a "green new deal".

Climate change figures in US presidential debate

Climate change figures relatively prominently on the agendas of both candidates for the US presidential election on 4 November. However their positions, which have evolved throughout the campaign, reveal a difference of approach as to how they would tackle climate change.

John McCain has moderated his position during the campaign: he supposedly favours a 60% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, based on 1990 levels, with a cap and trade system to be based on free allocation of carbon permits initially, while his energy policy places a strong emphasis on nuclear power.

Barack Obama's position is generally viewed as providing a more effective response to climate change: he favours an 80% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with a cap and trade system to be based on the full auctioning of carbon permits, as well as a focus on renewables and energy efficiency.

Long term emissions cuts on the agenda

The UK is set to adopt legislation on climate change with a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050 (based on 1990 levels). The bill, which has been amended to include emissions from shipping and aviation, has been described as "world class" by environmental NGOs.

Seventy French-speaking countries have pledged to halve their greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The 12th Francophonie summit affirmed its support for an international climate deal by the UNFCCC COP15 meeting at Copenhagen in 2009.

Gas cartel raises energy security fears

Russia, Iran and Qatar have announced that they are forming a gas cartel, along the lines of OPEC. The

move by the three countries, which control 60% of the global gas market, has raised energy security fears.

WHAT'S ON

Greens/EFA

12/11/2008 Conference on the impact of climate change on health and social services

EU

4-6/11 First trialogue negotiations on the climate package of EU legislation

12/11 Commission communication on energy security

1-12/12 UNFCCC COP14 - international climate negotiations in Poznan, Poland

4/12 Planned European Parliament vote on EU climate package

4-5/12 Council of EU environment ministers

11-12/12 European summit - planned decision on EU climate package

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Publication



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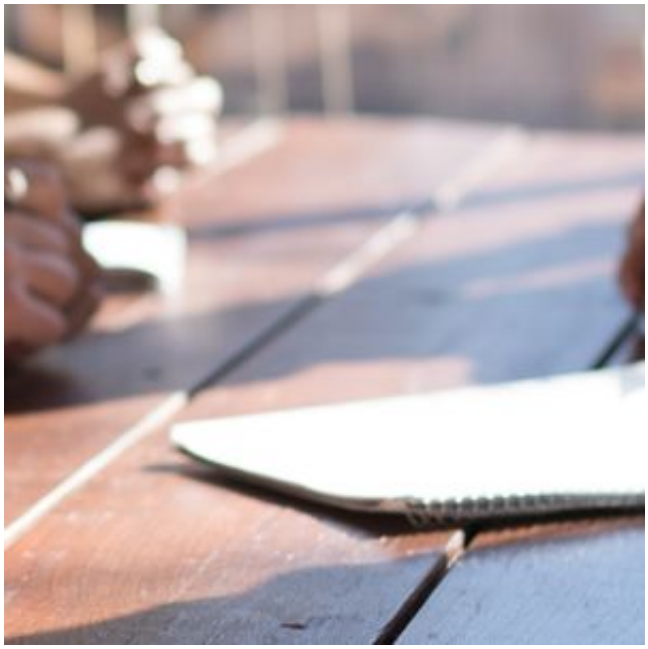

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