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Biofuels, land use and climate

MEPs address some flaws in EU biofuels policy but problems remain

The European Parliament's environment committee today voted on legislative proposals on biofuels, aimed at curbing the negative impact on the climate associated with indirect land use change (ILUC) due to biofuel production. The Greens welcomed the vote to ensure that the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from changes in land use will be accounted for but stressed that the new rules will not fully address the flaws associated with the production and use of biofuels. After the vote, Green climate spokesperson Bas Eickhout said:

"MEPs have voted to address some of the flaws in the EU's approach to biofuels, which exacerbate climate change and have a negative social impact. Ensuring that the emissions resulting from indirect land use change are accounted for under the fuel quality directive from 2020 onwards will help ensure the EU is not promoting the use of biofuels that clearly have a negative climate impact. This would help steer investors and the fuel industry away from bad biofuels.

"Today's vote would make it more difficult for unsustainable biofuels to be part of the mix, strengthening the so-called 'sustainability criteria' for biofuels under the EU's renewable energy directive. Under today's vote, emissions resulting from indirect land use change should be included in the calculation of the greenhouse gas savings limit for biofuels under the renewables directive in the future. This will help take account of the fact that Europe's current biofuel consumption is leading to the destruction of tropical rainforests, with major greenhouse gas implications. This will help ensure that, in order to make their way to the market, land-based biofuels cannot simply be as polluting as conventional oil-based fuels.

"Unfortunately, the new rules will allow a 6% share of land-based biofuels like food crops (first generation biofuels) in the overall fuel mix. Feeding crops into cars has fuelled rising food prices and rainforest destruction and the EU should not be further exacerbating these trends by promoting the use of agricultural land for fuel. We should be shunning the use of food crops for fuel altogether but this 6% 'cap' is clearly too high. Unfortunately, it was not possible to correct this. It is highly questionable why the EU should continue promoting biofuels without putting essential climate safeguards in place."

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