Press release | 17.12.2014

Tar sands

Door opened to tar sands oil in Europe as MEPs fail to reject unclear law

The European Parliament today narrowly failed to reject new fuel quality rules proposed by the EU Commission, which do not include a separate methodology for assessing greenhouse gas emissions from tar sands oil (1). The proposed rejection needed the support of an absolute majority of the Parliament to go through but only secured a simple majority of those voting. The result will make it easier for oil from tar sands to be sold in the EU. After the vote, Green climate change spokesperson **Bas Eickhout**, who co-sponsored the rejection, said:

"By waving through the fuel quality rules proposed by the EU Commission, we are opening the door to tar sands oil in Europe and this is deeply regrettable. The production of oil from tar sands is not only dirty and damaging to the environment, it also has a far greater impact on climate change than conventional oil. If the EU is serious about combatting climate change, it needs to be consistent with all its policies. A silver lining, which bodes well, is that we came close to securing the required support to reject this flawed proposal.

"Despite the spin, tar sands oil has nothing to do with European energy security but is instead merely about placating the Canadian government in the context of the EU-Canada trade agreement. We should not be making EU laws to the order of the Canadian government. Europe does not need this highly-polluting fuel and we should not be encouraging its production.

"The bigger picture is the future of the fuel quality directive itself. It was one of the 5 legislative measures adopted by the EU at the end of 2008 as part of its climate and energy package and is a crucial piece of legislation that should deliver actual emissions reductions for 2020 and beyond. We now have a flawed methodology for EU fuel quality rules and this will limit the effectiveness of the legislation for delivering greenhouse gas reductions. While we want the legislation to continue beyond 2020, we believe this flawed methodology must be rectified."

(1) Under the EU's fuel quality directive, suppliers are obliged to reduce the lifecycle greenhouse gas intensity of transport fuel 6% by 2020 (compared to 2010). Originally, the idea was to have separate default values for calculating the lifecycle emissions of different sources of fossil fuels, so oil from tar sands would have its own greenhouse gas intensity value, separate to conventional oil. However, earlier this year, the Commission came out with a new proposal, with no separate method for tar sands oil. This would essentially make it much easier for increasing the share of oil from tar sands on the European market.

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