

Renewable energy: Biofuels industry alarmed by EP committee vote

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The biofuels industry reacted angrily to the decision by the European Parliament's Energy Committee (ITRE) to limit the contribution of biofuels in the target for renewable energy in transport. ITRE has adopted a report by Claude Turmes (Greens, Luxembourg) on the European Commission's January 2008 draft directive on the promotion of renewable energy (see Europolitics 3594). The **European Biodiesel Board** (EBB) railed against ITRE's proposed 5% interim target, by 2015, for renewable energy in transport. The committee, voting on 11 September, specified that 20% percent of the renewable transport energy target should come from technologies other than biofuels resulting in a 4% target for biofuels by 2015.

"This is unreasonably low compared to the 5.75% objective validated by the EU back in 2003," said Raffaello Garofalo, the EBB's secretary-general. "The 1.75% difference represents at least four million tonnes in terms of the biodiesel requirement." The EBB also condemned ITRE's decision to split up the targets giving significant shares (20% in 2015 and 40% in 2020) to "future hypothetical" technologies such as green electricity and hydrogen from renewable sources. Additionally, the EBB argues that raising the cut-off value for greenhouse gas savings to 45%, and 60% by 2015, will block more than 80% of biofuels produced in Europe, strategically favouring non-EU producers.

AYATOLLAH TURMES UNCOMPROMISING

Turmes was uncompromising in his opposition to "unsustainable" biofuels. "If the biofuels lobby is furious and calls me an ayatollah' then that is a brilliant sign. It shows that we have put a stop to first-generation investments," Turmes told Europolitics. For the Luxembourg MEP the maintenance of the binding target for biofuels is still a "bitter" pill to swallow even if the proportion of fuel coming from food or feed crops has been restricted. Other amendments in Turmes' report were more appreciated by the renewables sector. Aside from the legally binding interim targets, MEPs included a provision that electricity from outside the EU must actually be physically imported into the EU before it can count towards a member state's national target.

Greenpeace welcomed the vote as an "encouraging" step, even if MEPs are only "slowly" putting the brakes on unsustainable biofuels. Environmentalists and renewables associations appreciated the addition of binding interim and end targets as well as penalty measures to secure their achievement. Other measures included better access for renewables to electricity and gas networks, more streamlined administrative procedures as well as encouraging renewables in the heating of new buildings. The European Wind Energy Association (EWEA) spoke of "overwhelming" EP support for priority grid access and improved infrastructure for renewable energies. EWEA specifically appreciated several key amendments that support the quick development of physical connections to the grid, priority access and priority during dispatch for renewable energy. EWEA Chief Executive Christian Kjaer called on the Council to listen to the Parliaments' message. EWEA is also pleased at the "flexibility" mechanisms that allow member states to statistically transfer surplus renewable energy to count towards their national target, launching joint renewables projects with other member states and voluntarily agreeing joint, or harmonised, support mechanisms.

NUCLEAR AS CO2-FREE TRANSPORT FUEL

Despite the general agreement between MEPs within ITRE, Werner Langen (EPP-ED, Germany) intends to fight on to include account in national renewables targets of energy from non-CO2 sources such as nuclear and power from clean coal. Langen may even find a more receptive ear in the plenary given Parliament's pro-nuclear stance following enlargements in 2004 and 2007. The higher oil price has also increased interest in nuclear power among MEPs from older member states. Some ten amendments to Turmes' report, all rejected, stressed the CO2-free contribution of nuclear energy. Some of these amendments even sought to have new nuclear power plants count as providers of renewable' energy.