

ENVIRONMENT Renewables

Commission defends biofuels targets

MEPs call for changes to Commission proposal

UK report calls for slower expansion of biofuels

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The Commission has defended its plans to increase support for biofuels, despite growing criticism of biofuels targets as unworkable and environmentally undesirable.

MEPs on the European Parliament's environment committee voted on Monday (7 July) to amend the Commission's proposal on renewable energy, watering down the Commission's proposed target of getting at least 10% of transport fuel from renewable sources by 2020. Of the 44-person committee, 36 voted that the share should be 4% in 2015, followed by a review to determine the exact target for 2020. The rest abstained.

Critical report

The vote came the same day a critical report was published in the UK calling for politicians to slow down the expansion of biofuels. The report from the UK's Renewable Fuels Agency argued that current policies could reduce biodiversity and increase green-

house gas emissions. The review concluded that the EU's biofuels target is "unlikely to be met sustainably", though it added that a "sustainable biofuels industry" had a future. Ruth Kelly, the UK's transport minister, said she agreed with its conclusions to "amend not abandon" biofuels policy.

In March 2007, Tony Blair, the UK's then prime minister, along with the other EU national leaders, signed up to a target of getting 10% of transport fuels from biofuels by 2020.

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stricted to biofuels and a Commission spokesperson said that the authors of the UK study had not read the Commission's renewables proposal correctly because its 10% target was for renewable energy, not biofuels. But most observers have assumed that biofuels will be the major contributor to achieving a 10% renewables target for transport fuel.

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Political changes

Anti-biofuels campaigners said this week that the political tide was turning against biofuels. Adrian Bebb at Friends of the Earth Europe said politicians were "waking up to the fact that using crops to feed cars is a disaster in the making for both

people and nature".

But neither MEPs nor member states are united about biofuels. Last month MEPs on the Parliament's regional development, agriculture and transport committees voted in favour of reports that back the Commission's 10% target. The industry committee, the lead committee on this law, must vote in

September and all MEPs will vote in the autumn.

EU member states are divided. The UK, along with Germany and the Netherlands, is most cautious about biofuels, but many other countries are not opposed.

On Saturday (5 July), Jean-Louis Borloo, France's environment minister, emphasised that the EU's target was

to get 10% of transport energy from renewables and not from biofuels alone. He said that "member states haven't changed their minds", but it had "sunk in" that the target was not just about biofuels.



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10%

EU target for amount of transport fuels that should come from renewable sources

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The spokesman said: "It is not that we are stubborn