

## **Commission launches 'green scheme' for biofuel**

### **The European Voice**

The European Commission today sought to shore up the credibility of its policy on biofuel by announcing a 'green' certification scheme to guarantee that production of biofuel was not harming forests.

But critics said that the Commission was failing to close a policy loophole and biofuel production still risks doing more harm than good.

Günther Oettinger, the European commissioner for energy, announced today (10 June) that the Commission was setting up a voluntary certification scheme to certify that biofuel, whether from home-grown crops or imported, met "tough" EU standards.

Independent inspectors would screen the whole production chain "from the palm to the bioethanol plant, to the trader, to the haulier" to ensure that only sustainable biofuel was produced, he said.

"Our certification scheme is the most stringent in the world and will make sure that our biofuels meet the highest environmental standards," he said.

The Commission also published guidance for growers stating that biofuel cannot be produced on natural forests, protected areas, wetlands and peatlands. By re-stating these rules, which are already written into EU law, the Commission hopes to lay to rest fears that forests could be converted into palm oil plantations.

In 2008 the European Union set a target that 10% of all transport fuel should come from renewable energy by 2020. Oettinger said that 6%-9% would come from first-generation biofuel, ie, crops grown to be converted into fuel.

The next generation of biofuel, made from agricultural waste or algae, is not yet commercially available.

But critics of the EU's biofuel policy said that the Commission had not done enough to ensure that biofuel would not lead to the destruction of protected areas. EU rules do not address the indirect effects of growing biofuel crops, for example when forests are chopped down to make way for farmland, because biofuel crops have displaced food production, known as indirect land-use change. An internal study by the Commission's trade department suggested that, as a result of these secondary effects, a big expansion of biofuel production could lead to a net increase of greenhouse-gas emissions.

"As long as the Commission is unwilling to deal with the issue of indirect land use change, all attempts by the EU to brand biofuels as sustainable will be misleading, counterproductive and destined for failure," said Nusa Urbancic at Transport and Environment, a campaign group.

Oettinger said that indirect land-use change needed to be analysed carefully, but insisted that biofuel offered "a bigger opportunity than dangers". The Commission plans to start a consultation on indirect land-use change before the summer.

The commissioner maintained that the EU's 10% target was reasonable, but signalled that changes could be made in the future: "I am not excluding...the need to take corrective measures in the future, to add things, or to correct things if need be."

<http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2010/06/commission-launches-green-scheme-for-biofuel/68220.aspx>