European biodiesel producers renew warning over indirect land use London

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European biodiesel producers renewed their concerns Friday over EU plan to penalize certain biofuels based on the impact of indirect land use change (ILUC) in their production, questioning the assumptions of a key study being used by policy makers in Brussels.
Land use change effects cannot be observed directly, remain theoretical concepts and it is therefore impossible to attribute ILUC values to individual consignments of biofuels, the European Biodiesel Board said in a statement.

Citing two newly commissioned studies, the EBB claims that the assumptions and methodology used by US-based International Food Policy Research Institute which the EU is using as a basis for its policy, are "not scientifically proven" and flawed.
The indirect land use modelling undertaken by IFPRI has a large number of problems, and the result is that the ILUC emissions are greatly overestimated," one of report's authors, Don O'Connor, of the S&T business consultancy, said in the statement.
The EBB questions the basis of the IFPRI study, accusing it of only assessing biofuels impact, without a corresponding assessment of the negative side-effects of fossil fuels use.
The EBB also commissioned the Kiel Institute for World Economy to perform a critical review of the IFPRI study earlier this year.
"The econometric correlation between cropland expansion and for example, deforestation has not been shown to be statistically significant," Kiel University professors said.
The ILUC studies are needed to design sustainability criteria on green fuels used in the EU's 27 member states, and are a key part of implementing its long-term renewable energy targets.
But European biofuel producers have objected to the proposed moves, fearing much of Europe's traditional rapeseed and palm oil-based biodiesel could fail to meet minimum carbon-saving thresholds set down by Brussels.
Over two-thirds of European biodiesel is made from locally sourced rapeseed oil which competes with food crops, which have been assigned a default CO2 saving value of 36% under existing proposals.

RAPESEED CONCERNS

Under the EU's existing Renewable Energy Directive, biofuels used in Europe will need to emit at least 35% less greenhouse gases than fossil fuels by 2013, rising to 50% by 2017.
Future ILUC values for biofuels would, therefore, likely mean rapeseed biodiesel falls below the 35% carbon saving threshold for biofuel biodiesel producers fear that imposing ILUC standards for biofuels in Europe risks favouring imported biodiesel feedstocks such as palm oil that have lower environmental standards.
"One of the paradoxical aspect of hypothetical ILUC legislative penalties against EU biodiesel would be that imported biodiesel from palm oil would become probably the easiest and cheapest source for biodiesel production," EBB Secretary General Raffaello Garofalo said.
According to the leaked minutes of a July meeting between European Commission energy and climate chiefs, the commission has agreed to delay a decision on ILUC by up to seven years in a political compromise to protect Europe's farmers and biofuel industry.
Under the deal, the commission would seek to introduce crop-specific ILUC values that would take effect at the latest in 2018, according to the meeting minutes.
The EU's energy commission has not confirmed the outcome of the July meeting and says it plans to complete its ILUC policy proposal in the second half of 2011.
Meanwhile, as the debate over ILUC impact continues to rage, over 100 scientists and economists have separately written to the European Commission calling for ILUC to be accounted for in its biofuels policy making, according to a report.
In a letter to policy makers, the scientists argue that assigning biofuels a zero or "carbon neutral" emissions value "is clearly not supported by the [best available] science," Brussels-focused EurActiv reported.

“The scientists' letter cites peer-reviewed research over several years, some commissioned by the European Commission, which show that displaced human activity caused by converting forests and grasslands to biofuels production can result in substantial CO2 emissions," according to the report.
--Robert Perkins,