

Parliament wants to keep 10% target for biofuels

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The European Union should persist in seeking to obtain 10% of its transport fuel from renewable sources by 2020, an influential committee of MEPs will vote today (11 September).

In January, the European Commission proposed that 10% of transport fuel should come from renewable sources by 2020. The target has come under fire as it is inextricably linked to the pros and cons of biofuels. In July the European Parliament's environment committee voted to water down the target to 5% in 2015 and

to 8-10% in 2020. But the industry committee, which leads on this proposed law, is poised to vote in favour of a binding 10% target.

The deal was done on Tuesday (8 September) among a cross-party group of MEPs. They agreed to keep a binding 10% target with the proviso that two-fifths of it is derived from hydrogen or electric cars or greener second-generation biofuels.

Fiona Hall, a UK Liberal Democrat MEP involved in the negotiations, said that keeping a binding target was important as long as it was "a smart 10% target" with

incentives for developing second-generation biofuels and hydrogen cars. Britta Thomsen, a German Socialist MEP also involved in the talks, praised the compromise as she had feared that loosening the target could have undermined EU member states' commitments to renewable energy.

Greenhouse gas savings

But the committee is likely to split on the greenhouse gas savings of biofuels (the so-called sustainability criteria). The Liberal, Socialist, Green and Left (GUE-NGL) groups are united behind requiring biofuels to deliver a 45%

greenhouse gas saving immediately and 60% from 2015. The centre-right (EPP-ED) group opposes these goals. Claude Turmes, a Green Luxembourgish MEP who is drafting the Parliament's position on the renewables directive, predicted that it would be a "very tight vote" on this issue.

The biofuels lobby expressed disappointment at the compromise. Rob Vierhout, secretary-general of the European Bioethanol Fuel Association, said that such a deal "would bring the sector to a standstill". He attacked "the silly sub-targets" as illogical, since the sus-

tainability criteria would guarantee green biofuels.

Meanwhile the directive is being discussed in the Council of Ministers. Most diplomats are backing a proposal by Germany, Poland and the UK that would encourage joint cross-border renewable energy projects that count towards national targets.

Loop-holes

Turmes alleged that some governments are trying to dilute the directive. He said that those "who do not dare attack the overall targets" were creating loop-holes "through the Council". He believes that guaranteed ac-

cess to the power grid is essential for renewable energy operators and accused Poland and the UK of being "closer to the interests of the [non-renewable energy] incumbents".

He added that the Council's position on obligations to use renewable energy in new or renovated buildings were "dangerously weak" and would soften the impact of existing EU directives on buildings. National diplomats have added a provision that "cost-efficiency considerations" could exempt some buildings from an obligation to use a minimum level of renewable energy.

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