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BIOFUELS

Sustainability criteria targets approved

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The EU's member states made a breakthrough yesterday (3 September) in agreeing green safeguards to accompany a law encouraging the use of biofuels.

Deputy ambassadors approved targets on green safeguards – the so-called "sustainability criteria", which have been a stumbling-block for the biofuels proposal since the early part of this year. They agreed that all biofuels should deliver a greenhouse gas saving of 35% by 2015, rising to 50% in 2017 – the latter date was chosen because it is the middle of a range of national positions.

They have instructed their national experts (the so-called "ad-hoc" group) to clean up the text of the proposal, part of the renewables directive, and sort out technical issues on the methodology at a further meeting on Monday (8 September).

The deputy ambassadors will meet again next week (10 September) to try to resolve some political questions. France, holder of the EU's rotating presidency, has asked the diplomats to consider whether there should be an interim target on biofuels. They also want them to consider sub-targets for first and second-generation biofuels, in order to tilt the market in favour of greener second-generation biofuels.

A Council source said that the diplomats would have a final solution soon and predicted that the "broad lines" of an agreement may be fixed at an ambassadors' meeting on 17 September.

The European Parliament's industry committee votes on the renewables directive next week (11 September). The leading EPP-ED and Socialist MEPs in the committee favour sticking to the Commission's proposal that 10% of transport fuels should come from biofuels by 2020. However the Green and Left (GUE-NGL) MEPs favour a 4% target by 2015 followed by a review on future targets.