

Proposed EU electric vehicle quota "misguided"



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As Europe sits down once again to debate the Renewable Energy Directive, the biodiesel industry has urged MEPs and EU ministers to stick with proposals for a 10% renewable fuels target for road transport by 2020.

MEPs are debating the Directive today and tomorrow in Brussels as the first reading of the Directive's co-decision process, with the fuels target one of the key measures within the Commission's original proposals that could be softened.

Doubts about the sustainability of certain biofuels, which would be the main alternative fuel used to reach the 10% target at least in the short-term, have been cemented this summer by the UK's Gallagher Review.

After the UK government decided to slow down annual increases in renewable fuels targets, Europe looks set to discuss a downgrading of the 10% target towards 7%. Another idea could be to set specific quotas for using biofuels, hydrogen-powered vehicles and battery-powered vehicles.

Claude Turmes, the Luxembourg MEP leading the EU Parliament's side of the Directive negotiations said yesterday that energy crops were the "wrong track" for transport fuels, and that electric cars were the more "appropriate" technology.

But the European biodiesel industry has dismissed such ideas as "misguided".

It warned on Monday that requiring up to half of the alternative fuels obligation to be from hydrogen or electricity would not necessarily mean the energy coming from renewable sources.

Bernard Nicol, president of the European Biodiesel Board, said: "Those promoting such scheme are purposely confusing two very different concepts: on the one hand energy carriers such as hydrogen and electricity whose main added value is to avoid generating polluting emissions (for urban transportation only); on the other hand truly renewable energy sources such as biofuels that will help displacing fossil energy use."

Binding

"Industry fully understands the need to be able to demonstrate biofuels' economic and environmental credentials." Bernard Nicol, European Biodiesel Board, UK
Mr Nicol, who is head of the French biodiesel producer Diester Industrie, said a binding 10% renewable transport fuels target was the "only way" to enable investments needed to boost the supply of sustainable biofuels.

The biofuels industry organisation said the reality was that the 2020 target would be mostly met by biofuels, but accepted the need for sustainability rules to guard against biofuel production conflicting with food production and other issues.

Mr Nicol said: "Industry fully understands the need to be able to demonstrate biofuels' economic and environmental credentials. It is entirely committed to the development of a sustainability certification scheme that will enable biofuels to play a useful role in reducing fossil fuel dependence and tackling climate change."

The European Biodiesel Board, whose members produce 80% of European biodiesel, issued a position statement last week claiming that while biodiesel and biofuels production is continuing to develop, agricultural feedstock prices are now experiencing a "significant decrease".

"This reflects the very weak correlation between agricultural raw material prices and biodiesel expansion," it said.

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