

Titles Hopes of a sustainable future for EU biofuels policy have been dealt a blow following the European Commission's decision to delay a critical decision on how to account for the impacts of 'indirect land use change' (ILUC). Environmental groups BirdLife Europe, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and Transport & Environment (T&E) are calling for the immediate revision of biofuel sustainability criteria to take ILUC impacts into account. Nusa Urbancic of Transport & Environment (T&E) said: 'The science shows that Europe's biofuel policy currently causes more environmental problems than it solves. Despite that, after more than a year of work, and countless scientific studies, the European Commission has decided to delay action again, leading to continued uncertainty for the biofuels industry.' ILUC is a result of fields of food crops being converted for biofuel production. Additional farm land is needed to grow the displaced food somewhere else in the world, causing rainforests, grasslands and ancient peatlands to be ploughed up to meet the demand. This releases huge quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, has severe impacts on people and threatens some of our most valued biodiversity worldwide. Faustine Defosse of the EEB commented: 'A policy promoting biofuels that save emissions on paper but not in reality is doomed. The only way out of this scenario, and to secure a future for biofuels, is to start accounting for all emissions associated with its use, including indirect land use change'. A recent study by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) based on the National Renewable Energy Action Plans submitted by EU Member states found that, unless EU policy changes, extra biofuels coming on the market will increase greenhouse gas emissions by 81 to 167% (1). EU targets, agreed in 2008 as part of the EU's Renewable Energy Directive (RED), oblige Member States to source 10% of their fuels from renewable sources, resulting in a huge boom for biofuels. The RED also contains 'sustainability criteria', but these do not include the issue of ILUC but instead subject it to a Commission review by the end of 2010. Over the past year the Commission has gathered thousands of pages of research into the issue, the balance of evidence of the studies leaves no doubt that ILUC impacts are substantial. However, the Commission has been reluctant to release the findings of the studies and only did so following legal action by environmental groups (2). 'More and more evidence has revealed the impact of both direct and indirect land use change driven by the European Renewable Energy Directive' said Trees Robijns of BirdLife Europe. 'The Commission should do all it can to avoid negative direct and indirect effects on people, their environment and the climate. How much longer do we have to keep waiting before they take the evidence seriously and take action?' The environmental groups are calling for the full environmental impacts, including those from ILUC, to be taken into account in the sustainability criteria. Such an approach is the only way of ensuring that biofuels sold on the EU market are better than the fossil fuels they replace, and hence it is also the only way to give future investment security to the industry.