

European Parliament muddles vote on food versus fuel

Title

On 11 September the European Parliament voted on a legislative proposal on biofuels, the liquid fuels produced from biomass that are used in transports. Biofuels are part of the solution to limit CO₂ emissions in transports, but they also represent a risk. None or too little safeguards could lead to an insane system where land, currently used for food production, and forest areas will turn into land used for biofuel crops. This could not only threaten our food security, but it could also be counterproductive as the CO₂ emissions could increase instead of decrease.

In its 'climate package', the European Union committed to have, by 2020, 10% of all fuels used in transport coming from renewable sources. The cheaper and faster way to reach this target is through an increasing use of biofuels. If the policy is not well designed fuel crops will increase to satisfy a higher demand and will compete for land with food crops. Quickly the need for land will bring both food and fuel farmers to start using land that is now storing carbon, such as forests. Food prices will explode as well as CO₂ emissions, which are liberated by the cutting of forests. For the EU biofuels policy to meet its target - reducing CO₂ emissions in transports - the involuntary land-use displacement described above (so called Indirect Land Use Change, ILUC), must be accounted for properly and the percentage of land used for growing fuel crops must be limited to an amount which will not threaten food production.

A week ahead of the vote in the European Parliament, BirdLife Europe together with two other NGOs, organised a [debate on biofuels](#), co-hosted by MEPs Ismail Ertug and Corinne Lepage, who leads the legislative work on biofuels in the Environment Committee in the Parliament. Among the stakeholders attending the event, NGO representatives from Indonesia and Sierra Leone explained the detrimental effects already caused by crops grown for fuel in their countries, taking land away from the production of food necessary to the population, for the benefit of the fuel industry in Europe.

The outcome of the vote on 11 September was never the less disappointing. The European Parliament put a cap on the percentage of land used to produce fuels superior to the current consumption of biofuels in transports in Europe. But the cap is merely a decoy. It doesn't limit the expansion of the biofuels production necessary to protect the EU's food production and forests. Also, the Parliament introduced greenhouse gas accounting into only one of the two legal texts governing the biofuels production, making this disposition weak and almost ineffective. [Read BirdLife Europe's reaction to the vote.](#)

By now, the European Parliament should have started negotiations with the Council on the Biofuels Policy, but conservative forces in the Parliament have pushed for a second reading. This means that the text will be reviewed once again by the entire Parliament, with a possibility for MEPs to amend the parts they don't agree with. This second reading will notably benefit the biofuels industry and conservative MEPs who will turn a quite progressive text into a regressive document, serving only vested interests.

[Presentations from the biofuels debate organised by BirdLife Europe, the European Environmental Bureau \(EEB\) and Transport and Environment \(T&E\) on 4 September 2013.](#)



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