



Thematic Area:
Towards a green economy

Start date: 1st February 2009
Status: Complete

Key contact



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Summary

This statement is the output from a workshop convened by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative (CCI), on 27th February 2009, on the impacts on biodiversity conservation of the EU sustainability criteria for biofuels and their implementation. CCI is a collaborative partnership created by the University of Cambridge and leading global and UK conservation organisations. As a focal point for the biggest cluster of conservation organisations in the world, CCI aims to secure a sustainable future for biodiversity and humanity through an innovative and interdisciplinary partnership of leaders in conservation; and to inform decision making by government, industry and civil society in local, national and international contexts.

The potential to secure biodiversity and carbon benefits through trade agreements

Current safeguards in the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Promotion of the use of energy from renewable resources set a low baseline for sustainability. However, bilateral and multilateral agreements offer a potential vehicle to ensure that biofuels production brings triple wins in terms of 1) proven and significant emissions savings from fuels across their whole life cycle; 2) positive safeguards for biodiversity and carbon stocks and 3) positive impacts socially and economically (including for rural development, and local people). The primary purpose of bilateral agreements should be to ensure that EU use and subsidy of biofuels causes no harm to people, biodiversity or carbon stocks in any country.

The following recommendations focus on environmental safeguards, as the area of competence of the organisations participating in the Cambridge Conservation Initiative.

It is very important that EU Member States (MS) and the European Commission consider fully how bilateral and multilateral agreements can deliver not just a robust trade agreement, but also biodiversity and carbon stock protection. A habitable climate and functioning ecosystems are essential for sustaining human life and eliminating poverty and thus all EU policies should ensure their protection. To fail in this regard would be to ignore the mandate of the European Council that biofuels should be delivered sustainably, and risk a public backlash. There are significant gaps in the current sustainability criteria and legal uncertainties in their definition. Therefore bilateral agreements are a promising way to incorporate genuine sustainability into the supply chain.





Technical and financial assistance

The EU MS and the Commission must take steps to avoid any of the means of verification of sustainability, in this case bilateral and multilateral agreements, becoming ‘a race to the bottom’ whereby those importing countries requiring the lowest standards of sustainability are preferred as trading partners. Instead, trade agreements should be viewed as a real opportunity to deliver a sustainable biofuels policy as mandated by EU Council. In establishing trade agreements the EU will offer access to a system of EU subsidies for renewable energy. But EU countries should be willing to provide *in addition* the necessary technical and financial resources, through bilateral and multilateral agreements, to safeguard biodiversity and carbon stocks. This could include technical and financial assistance and resources for:

- i. Monitoring, including remote sensing and real time on-the-ground biodiversity monitoring.
- ii. Sustainable land use planning, monitoring and enforcement of land use policies and supporting the establishment of land titles.
- iii. Agronomic and technological improvement, research and farm advisory services.
- iv. Carbon stock preservation. The possibility of providing financial assistance linking to the UN Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) mechanism should be explored.

Biodiversity and other measures

Bilateral and multilateral agreements should include **as a minimum**, the following measures to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services on the ground:

- i. **A clear statement on areas that will be ‘no go’ areas for biofuels** (i.e. areas from which biofuels production will be excluded). This should include all legally protected areas; areas of high carbon value (forests, peatlands and wetlands); areas designated by international Conventions; and areas for the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems. In order to ensure that the increasing worldwide demand for biofuels and bioliquids, and the incentives for their use provided for in the Directive, should not have the effect of “encouraging the destruction of biodiverse lands” (recitals 69), these ‘no go areas’ should include Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)¹ such as all IBAs (Important Bird Areas)² and IPAs (Important Plant Areas)³. Wherever possible, biofuels production should be avoided in areas of natural or semi-natural habitat in biodiversity hotspots.
- ii. **Agreed priority areas for biofuels production based on an analysis of areas that are most appropriate for biofuels production using robust environmental and socio-economic criteria.** Such areas could include truly idle or degraded land where this has been defined and evaluated to ensure that biofuels production does not cause significant harm to carbon stocks, biodiversity and ecosystem services, or to people.

¹ As defined by a consortium of conservation organisations including IUCN, BirdLife International, Conservation International and Plantlife and identified at the national level in collaboration with these organisations.

² As defined by the BirdLife International Partnership <http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites/index.html>

³ As defined by Plantlife <http://www.plantlife.org.uk/international/plantlife-ipas.html>



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- iii. **Commitments and policies for sustainable land use planning** to identify appropriate areas and 'no go' areas, together with commitments and plans for enforcement and evaluation of success. This should include measures to monitor and manage the cumulative impacts of biofuel production on biodiversity, soils, water and people, taking together the combined effects of separate projects
- iv. **Natural resource protection measures relating to biofuels production** such as avoiding excessive water consumption leading to water stress or flooding; watershed catchment management and ecosystem services management in biofuel production areas; and measures to avoid adverse indirect impacts of biofuel crop plantations on important areas for biodiversity, for example from water extraction.
- vii. **Mandatory requirements and quality standards for strategic environmental assessment and project level environment and social impact assessment.**

In addition, EU countries, the Commission and third party countries should explore and pursue opportunities for the following measures to be included in bilateral and multilateral agreements:

- i. Commitment to achieve significant levels of GHG emissions savings i.e. at least 60% now, rather than in 2017.
- ii. Provisions to deal with indirect land use change (ILUC) as a component of a land use planning system. For example:
 - Limiting expansion of energy crops to soundly defined idle/marginal land or to current land uses where ILUC risk is minimal.
 - Measures to increase productivity of existing biofuels production and for combining fuel and food production. This should be in line with sustainable use of natural resources and avoid increasing fertiliser use, since fertiliser production is an energy intensive process and application leads to emissions of nitrous oxide, a potent greenhouse gas.
- iii. Measures linking to mechanisms to decrease deforestation and degradation such as REDD.
- iv. Mechanisms for avoiding negative impacts on food security locally and globally.



Transparency

All parties should ensure adequate transparency of bilateral and multilateral agreements (to be compliant with the Directive, recitals 79), particularly on biodiversity and socio-economic provisions and how these are developed. This should involve consultation with international and national (in producer countries) NGOs engaged in environmental and social issues and with knowledge of key risks and priority objectives.

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